
THE

PRISONER'S HERBAL

N I C O L E R O S E



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Nicole Rose



The Prisoner's Herbal, Nicole Rose

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For Sam

*To my best friend who is still in prison. You brought me joy every day in the prison gardens, one day you'll be free and we will gather plants together on the outside.
This book is dedicated to you.*

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Prisoner's Herbal. This book has been put together to create a resource for prisoners who would like to learn more about plants growing in prison courtyards. It will be distributed to prisoners around the world via supportive individuals and solidarity projects. It contains detailed descriptions of plants, their medicinal and edible uses, how to use them and what health challenges they can support. There is also a section on how to use items that can be bought on canteen for health uses, such as salt, pepper, chilli powder and more.

When I was 21 years old, I entered one of Britain's highest security prisons for women and began a 3.5-year prison sentence. This book shares stories of the relationships I built with plants in the prison gardens. The profiles in this book highlight their edible, medicinal and other traditional uses and most importantly, how to use them in a prison context with limited access to resources or common medicine making ingredients such as alcohol or oil. The prison where I did my sentence was a privatised prison meaning I wasn't able to access the spices and vegetables available in some UK prisons (but certainly not all). However, I have asked friends inside to send me copies of their canteen sheets and I have created a section of the book with remedies from these ingredients that are available. I also did some research into what is available in prisons in the United States, which seems even more limited than what I call 'prison island UK'.

I am painfully aware that prisoners will all have different access to plants. A minority may work in the prison gardens and may even grow many more plants than those that are detailed in this book, however, the majority will only see a prison courtyard once a day or even once a week if they are lucky. Many

others still will not see the outside at all, contesting with years and years of solitary confinement. For those that can access a courtyard, it may have some grass, but more likely it will just be concrete - hopefully with some defiant plants growing through the cracks. In some prisons, they actively poison all plants with the chemical spray Roundup to maintain a sterile environment to further dehumanise prisoners.

If you are a prisoner reading this then I hope at whatever level of access you have, this book is interesting and useful.

I have also organised information in an index so that you can see a list of common health issues and which plants are recommended. I thought for many people who are new to herbalism, this can often be an easier way to start. You will also find a glossary of terms. I have tried to limit botanical and medical jargon as much as possible but certain words are very specific in understanding actions of plants, so please just look up any that are not clear.

The final pages offer a resources section with recommended books and herbal schools that offer distance learning programs, including one that sends course materials completely free to prisoners.

In solidarity,

Nicole Rose

MY STORY

When I was 21 years old, I entered one of Britain's highest security prisons for women called HMP Bronzefield and began a 3.5-year prison sentence. I was sent down for 'conspiracy to blackmail' after a £2.1million police operation to repress and criminalise the grassroots campaign I was part of to close Europe's largest animal testing company who kill more than 100,000 animals every single year. After raiding and arresting more than 32 people, the operation eventually put 12 of us through the courts and people were sentenced from between a few months to 11 years. I was no stranger to prison, however, my first boyfriend got sent down when I was just 16 years old and so I had regularly visited prisons across England by the time it was my turn to go through the gates. All-in-all I spent just under two years in the prison itself and the rest under strict probation outside.

For many, this could seem like a long sentence, however, for many loved ones that I know inside that are serving long sentences it really is not. Friends and comrades are serving life sentences or contemporary versions of them and are literally losing their whole lives to prison. Many do not know when or if they will ever be free.

Since getting out of prison, I have done my best to support my close friends that remain inside. Over many years I have witnessed their mental and physical health decline as the brutality of the prison system has taken its toll. From increasingly horrifying self-harm to frequent suicide attempts. Nine years into her sentence, my best friend Sam was diagnosed with cancer. Her literal battle between life and death escalated due to serious medical neglect by the private

prison that she was in. They failed to take her to hospital appointments, failed to communicate test results and completely failed with post-surgery aftercare where she contracted infection after infection. The doctors in the specialist hospital who had operated on her told her that the prison had failed to bring her to over 9 appointments. Each time they had assembled a surgical team to remove the cancerous tissues from her, and the prison didn't even call to say they would not bring her. It is an absolute miracle she is still alive after two major operations, multiple MRSA infections and years of hellish stress fighting for her life. The consultant told me if the cancer had grown by even 4mm it would have been game over.

**FOR PEOPLE READING THIS IN PRISON, YOU WILL NOT BE SURPRISED.
YOU WILL HAVE WITNESSED, AND MOST LIKELY, EXPERIENCED MEDICAL
NEGLECT YOURSELF.**

You will have been in pain and been unable to access painkillers, or seen people begging for medical attention completely ignored by prison officers. When I was in prison, a girl even miscarried and was left alone to bleed out in her cell before being unlocked the next day.

It is in part because of this intense medical neglect that I felt motivated to put together this book. Herbalism is incredibly empowering because plants give us the opportunity to actively care for our own health without fighting an authority (we all know that everything is a fight in prison). Likewise, prison food is awful and wild plants can supplement industrial diets bringing desperately needed vitamins and minerals to our bodies. More than anything, learning about plants is fun. They become familiar friends and help counter the loneliness of imprisonment.

When I got sent down I was expecting to be totally removed from nature. But I remember when I entered the prison and first got 'processed', that first night where I was taken across the main courtyard to house block one where the newcomers go, and I looked down and could see dandelions pushing through the concrete. I could see magpies and crows on the prison walls and fences. I knew that I would find comfort in witnessing this wild resistance and this book captures these memories and experiences.

After several months of bang up and working in the gym waiting to get 'security clearance' for a job in the gardens, I finally got the slip under my door

that I had been assigned to work in the garden party. This meant I could work outside with a small crew of other girls. Most of the labour (dare I say all of it) was completely monotonous - removing the weeds that I loved from beds or paths (or in my case, pretending to weed them or always leaving the roots in the ground so they'd regrow!) or mowing the grass. Occasionally, we could do more interesting tasks like finally planting up a vegetable garden in the main courtyard, as well as building a veg patch and herb garden in the new garden of the mother and baby unit of the prison.

The courtyards were mostly small triangular concrete yards with a triangle of grass in the middle, but amidst the grass were some of my favourite plants such as yarrow and daisy. In the main courtyard, there were ornamental roses - so many that when we had to prune them all in the winter, I got really bad RSI in my wrist from working in the cold and cutting them back. Under these roses, I found mineral-rich plants like chickweed and dandelions.

Another job we had was clearing areas near the inside perimeter fences, this mostly involved strimming curbs or pulling plants out of the gravel. It was here that I encountered plants like mallow and plantain who loved the sandy stony soil.

Of course, I was not allowed to take plants back to my room, so began a daily adventure of how the hell to smuggle things back. We were searched after every shift on the gardens party which involved a pat-down by an officer. I learnt all manner of tricks of putting leaves in my bra or underwear, or carrying them in my gloves and doing a bit of sleight of hand before being searched. If I had a library appointment after being in the garden, it would mean I could even smuggle plants around pressed into my books. Fortunately, I think officers suspected I wasn't a drug user because of what I had been sent down for, so they didn't search me as vigilantly as folks who they suspected were trading or passing drugs around the prison. Little did they know that I'd often take herbs back for friends on my wing or make them cups of tea when they had period pains or tummy cramps. Other than bringing things back to my room, I'd also just eat plants there and then when I was weeding. My palate became adapted to the more bitter taste of wild plants.

When we built the vegetable gardens in the main courtyard, I asked the prison officer in charge of the garden party if we could grow some rocket. This plant is so nutritious - full of vitamins and minerals, including zinc and vitamins A, B6, C and K. It is also super easy to germinate - it spreads everywhere. I soon did some 'guerrilla planting' where I would take the seeds and spread them in

the various courtyards of the prison to maintain my supply of fresh greens and so that others could access them too - if only more of the prisoners knew what they were and that you can eat them!

In addition to working in the prison gardens, I was also incredibly lucky to access some financial support from a charity to undertake a distance learning course in horticulture and permaculture design, as well as a short distance learning course in herbalism. It sounds so cheesy to write this, but these courses really did change my life. On release, I learnt to grow on a bigger scale and have now taught hundreds of other low-income families to learn how to grow food. The workers cooperative that I started now has multiple community gardens, a mushroom farm, wildflower park, forest garden and more, as well as a 4.5-acre permaculture project where I now live.

My passion for herbal medicine has only grown over time and in 2018, I decided to apply to train as a clinical herbalist. Scared that my conviction would be a barrier, I finally found a school that did not discriminate and so I am now halfway through a four-year training, meaning that soon I will be able to more proactively help people with their health by accessing herbal medicines. I also started the Solidarity Apothecary project which you can read about more at the back of the book.

The herbal medicine course that I studied in prison, as incredibly inspiring and interesting as it was, made herbalism feel abstract for me in the context I was in. I could never make any of the things that the assignments suggested, whether it was tinctures or salves and ointments. Likewise, most or nearly all the plants they included were unavailable to me at the time. Therefore I wanted to write this herbal book as a way of bringing herbalism alive to people in prison. I know that many people will still read these pages and feel an intense heartache because these plants are still out of reach to them (like the ingredients in the canteen section which I would have killed to have access to when I was in prison). But I hope, for everyone, that there is at least one plant that calls to them which they can find.

CONNECTING WITH PLANTS IN PRISON IS NOT JUST ABOUT MAKING MEDICINE, IT IS ABOUT FRIENDSHIP. IT IS ABOUT CONTENDING WITH THE ISOLATION, DESPAIR, TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE WITH SOMETHING ALIVE AND BEAUTIFUL.

A part of one of the tattoo sleeves on my arm reads ‘never alone’. I got it before I got sent down because I wanted to remind myself that I am not alone - during years of state repression, I felt isolated and betrayed by the movement I grew up in, I felt like any grassroots or revolutionary struggle to change things was ultimately weaker than those with power and control, I felt small and vulnerable - but plants remind me that they are on our side. All the plants, animals and ecosystems in the world want recovery, they want freedom, they want health - and with them as allies, we are never alone.

I would, therefore, encourage people not just to make things with the plants they find or use them for health ailments, but to try to make friends with plants. In the herbal world, they are commonly called ‘plant allies’. I’ve written a whole section about what this means in practice. The short version is that we can build friendships with plants by simply hanging out with them, sitting with them, drawing them, tasting them.

In prison, I used to sleep with a dandelion root under my pillow. It made me feel safer, it literally made me feel grounded. Before I had read many herbal books or worked through my coursework, I would have vivid dreams about plants. I dreamt once about plantain talking to me and telling me it was useful for ‘woundage’ before looking up in a book that it is one of the best plants to apply to wounds. I would make a mini altar under my bed with dried plants from the garden and bring it out after bang up as something that made me feel comforted. As we all know in prison, it only lasted as long as the next cell search, but the process of creating that sacred space was so valuable to me.

The relationships with plants that we build - they stay with us for life. Every time I’m driving to a prison visit, stressed about being late or anxious about the intensity of what might happen and I pull up at motorway services and see a patch of dandelions, I feel strengthened. When I get bitten by a spider at a gig, I know which plant to look for in the city streets outside the venue. Each time I see yarrow now I feel like I’ve bumped into an old friend. This stuff probably sounds mega-hippyish, but it’s the truth. Once you become familiar with different plants, that familiarity and comfort never goes away.

I hope that this book can be the start of a journey that you can continue and deepen for the rest of your life. Creating a relationship with the wild, inside and out can sustain us in even the darkest moments.

PREPARING PLANT MEDICINES IN PRISON

There are so many different ways to prepare plant medicines. On the outside, we might make alcohol extracts (called tinctures) or extracts using glycerin (called glycerites). Or we may be able to craft all kinds of oils, ointments, capsules, potions and lotions! But in prison, our options are limited. However, there are still some great ways to successfully use plants and these methods are certainly in no way inferior!

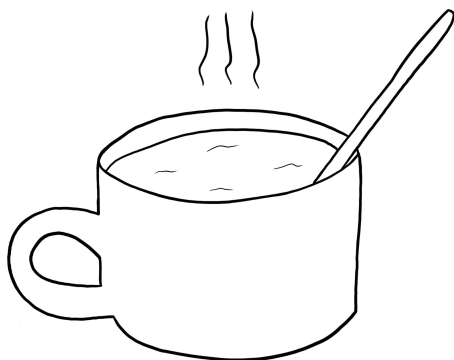
This section introduces the different options possible. I know how ingenious and creative prisoners can be so I am sure you will find even more creative ways to make medicines.

Teas

Herbal tea at its most simple is adding hot water to a herb and drinking it. The same way we make a 'normal' tea, which usually comes

in a tea bag. To make a herbal tea in prison, you can add about a teaspoon of dried herb or two teaspoons if it is fresh. Cover with hot water and leave for 5-10 minutes before drinking to make sure it is really brewing up in strength. I'd also just really encourage you to experiment if you prefer things tasting less strong etc.

On the outside people will use different things to mean you don't get bits of the plant in your mouth while you sip! Some people use small coffee



percolators or teapots. In prison, I would just use my spoon to either hold plants down at the bottom or to scoop them out before I drank the tea. If you were able to steal a bit of mesh from the kitchen this could be helpful, even a hat of the people that work in the kitchen servery can be used as a way to strain plants out.

If you add milk it will go funny so it's not recommended but if you need a sweetener then sugar etc is okay. It's worth trying teas without it just so you know the flavour! Also, a lot of the healing properties of plants are in the tastes and the effect they can have in the body.

Hot infusions

A hot infusion is basically the same as a tea but brewed for longer. For some plants, you might want to leave them brewing overnight to get maximum strength. If you do leave them overnight, then make sure you take out all the plant material the next morning. I've tried to indicate in the plant profiles which plants benefit from this kind of long infusion.

If you are making a tea or an infusion with an aromatic plant (such as chamomile) then it is best to cover the container with some kind of lid so that the aromatic oils don't escape as much.

In the prison where I was, we were given a tea flask which meant we had



some hot water for tea after we were locked in (because having your own kettle was allegedly a privilege). I used to add plants into my flask and fill it with hot water then drink in the morning. These flasks are good because you can open the lid slightly and pour out the water without too much plant material getting out. You can then easily scoop out the plant and wash out the flask.

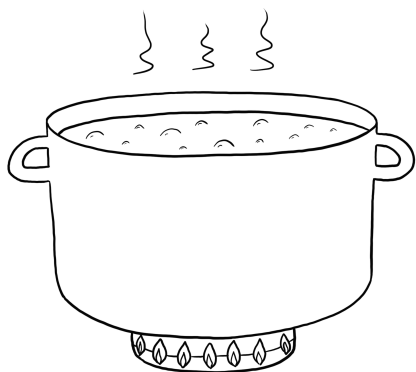
Cold infusions

Some plants make more powerful medicine when covered with cold water rather than hot. This is mainly plants with large amounts of mucilage (aka healing slime!), such as mallow which is included in this book. It's generally best to let these cold infusions brew for as long as possible - ideally 12 hours if possible.

Decoction

A decoction is basically where

you add plant material to a pan with water and then simmer gently. This is good for at least 20-30 minutes but ideally, you would keep it going until the water had reduced to half. I know this option is probably not possible for the majority of prisoners, however, some people are able to cook or access kitchens as part of 'activities' within the prison, so you might be able to do this. Once it is boiled you can strain and drink. It will store for 24 hours or longer in a fridge ideally, and then you can drink a cup or two through the course of a day.



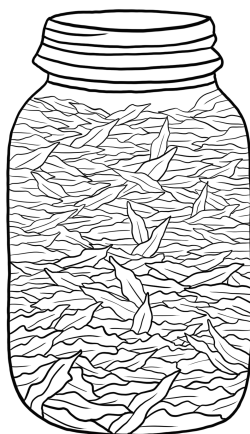
Herbal Vinegar

So again, vinegar is not going to be available in many prisons but it is listed on the canteen list so some people in England and Wales will be able to access it. You will need a clean jar (saved from something else, like peanut butter) - make sure it is super clean! Stuff the jar as much as possible with the plants you want to make a herbal vinegar from. In this book, good ones include dandelions, nettles

and chickweed. Then pour over with vinegar. Make sure you pop any air bubbles. Fill it right up to the top with vinegar and then put the lid on.

This then needs to infuse for ideally two weeks. After this time, strain out (or if you have nothing to strain it with, pick out all the plant material). I know it's not always possible to hide something in your room for that long but do your best! Even in a few days, many of the minerals will have been extracted into the vinegar. Vinegar is an exceptional medium for extracting minerals.

This then becomes a nutritious ingredient that you have which you can sprinkle on your food. Or add a capful to some hot (or cold) water to drink. This is a fantastic way to have access to nutrition when you might not be able to access plants regularly. Check on it regularly as it is easy for mould to develop. Make sure you throw it away and start again if it does.



Eye Bath

Now be very careful with anything to do with your eyes, you need to be super hygienic and careful that you don't introduce any unwanted material to them! Some of the herbs listed in this book will have a great effect on the eyes in terms of reducing inflammation and irritation. You can brew these up as a tea (see above) and then make sure you leave it to cool.

The best thing I found inside to use is one of those tiny plastic cups that they give out the medication in. You can fill one of these with some cold tea and then basically put your eye over it and rapidly flutter your eyelids to effectively wash them out. Some people might tip it up with their eye inside but I don't enjoy this at all as you can then get tea all over yourself and I find the eye has a natural reaction to close to protect itself.

Adding herbs to baths

Not all prisons will have baths by any means, but we were lucky where I was to have two showers and one bath between the 55 of us on the wing. To add herbs to your bath, it's best to brew them up in a tea or infusion as described above and then simply tip it in the bath. This is easier after you have strained the herbs out, so you have less cleaning up to do.

However, some people might like having herbs floating around in there,

you'll just need to wipe them all out afterwards.

Foot baths

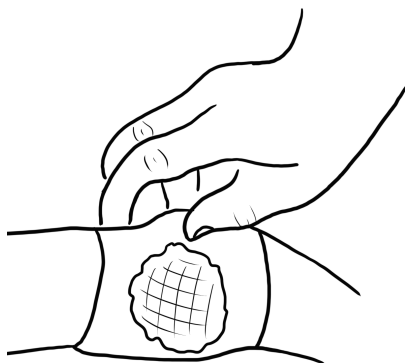
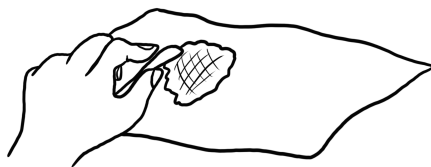
So the challenge here is finding a container big enough for your feet. Ideally, you'd want something the size of a washing up bowl. If you couldn't find anything that big you might be able to just use a normal bowl and soak parts of your foot that need it e.g. if you had an infected toe.

If you can get some kind of plastic container, then filling it with hot water, adding in plants, and letting it cool enough for your comfort, is an amazing way to support with skin and other issues on the feet. Even better is to make a strong infusion beforehand and add into the container.



Poultices

At its absolute simplest, a poultice is plant material prepared and applied directly to the skin. There are different ways plants may need to be prepared depending on what plant is being used and what is being treated. A simple 'spit poultice' is where you chew the plant material (such as a plantain leaf) in your mouth, just biting it and adding some of your saliva in there, and then you place it over the affected area. The spit helps to activate some of the compounds in the plant. There is understanding that chewing up the plant also enables plant medicine to act internally or to trigger certain healing processes in the body.



A more advanced method is to mix the herb with water for two minutes. This could be dried or fresh herb or a herbal powder (see the spices and condiments section). If it's possible to 'simmer' the herb that's amazing, but if not just brewing for a couple of minutes will work fine too. You can then apply the wet/damp herb to the affected area.

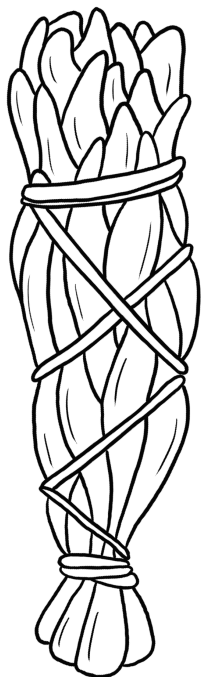
Depending on what you are treating, it can also be nice to mix the herbs with some kind of flour to make it more of a paste. Sometimes you might need to use a 'gauze' in-between the herbs and the direct skin. Please see the section on wound healing for more info about this.

Compress

A compress is where you soak some material in a herb tea or infusion and then apply to the skin. This can be hot or cold depending on the condition. In terms of materials in prison, options include clean cloths, a towel (if not too thick) or pieces of fabric like bandanas or ripped up t-shirts etc. You could even use a bit of a pillowcase.

Burning herbs

People have burnt herbs for thousands of years. This is often as part of spiritual rituals and to cleanse spaces, but can also be for practical



purposes such as trying to fumigate and prevent infectious diseases spreading within a space. You can tie up small bundles of dried herbs and burn them.

Obviously, unusual plant smells and smoke is a big red flag to get raided and searched, so it might not be the best thing to do in a prison environment. However, I would add a small bundle of dried yarrow to my altar and argue it was part of my religious practice because I'd registered as a pagan.

Spiritual traditions all over the world have burned herbs as part of ceremonies, cleansing and other

spiritual practices so you might be able to argue this so it is not taken away. All you need to do is gently light the ends and carry around your space before dibbing it out. Don't go too mad as a lot of the aromatic chemicals are very strong, especially in a confined space like a prison cell. Burning for a minute or two will be plenty.

Steams

To do a simple herbal steam, simply add the herbs to a bowl with some hot water. Cover yourself and the bowl with a towel so that the steam warms up your face. You might want to keep adding in hot water to extend the steam. A face steam helps to clear out your sinuses. It's also a good way to make the most of a plant's antimicrobial properties.



DRYING & STORING PLANTS

Drying herbs

So unfortunately in prison, we don't have access to dehydrators or big screens to help dry herbs successfully. However, in my time inside I managed to successfully dry some things out in the following ways:

- *Placing herbs on the prison radiators:* Our radiators were basically completely built into the foot of the wall creating a little ledge. This was absolutely perfect for me because it meant that I could easily spread plants out and the temperature was consistent. The plants were also out of direct sunlight.

However, it's not ideal for prison searches because obviously, things are on view. I found that the radiator extended underneath the 'bed' (which I affectionately called 'the shelf' as the mattress was so thin it was basically like sleeping on a metal shelf). This meant I could dry plants under my bed, which were less in view. Our cells are meant to be checked every day, but a lot of lazy prison officers will just do a brief look in and tap the windows then walk out, meaning my drying roots were not found. Unfortunately, with bigger 'cell spins' a lot of things I had dried were confiscated. You win some, you lose some!

- *Books:* Another method I used was placing plants in books as if I was pressing them. This would mean that their water content would slowly evaporate. If you don't want to get the book dirty you can just use scrap paper between the plant and the book. You'll need to make sure there is some weight involved, like stacking a pile of books on top of each other. This method only really works for

leaves/stems/flowers and not for roots.

- *Spreading over paper:* You can also just spread herbs out over paper and leave out to dry naturally. Direct sunlight can often affect the quality of plants that are drying, however, sadly most of us know that we aren't at risk of that in cells with tiny windows. If you can access some large paper, like big A3 sheets from the art room this is ideal. It's good to spread plants out so they are not touching and make sure it is only one layer.

- *Paper bags:* On the outside, a common way to dry herbs is to hang them up inside paper bags (ideally brown bags that block out the light). I don't know if you'd be able to access anything similar in prison but you might be able to get things given to you in a bag in the pharmacy.

- *Drying in bunches:* You can also just tie plants together into bunches and hang until they are dry. I didn't do this in prison because of the visible suspicion from officers, but if you had some screws that weren't a problem in this way then it's probably an effective way to do it. Ideally, you would gather the herbs into a small bunch and tie the end with an elastic band (like a hair band). You would leave them up somewhere and not in the direct sun if possible until they are dry to the touch. If you have are lucky to have a fan in your room then directing it at the herbs will obviously speed things up too!

I would not recommend drying anything in the microwave as it will destroy a lot of the medicinal compounds needed. If you have access to an oven, then you can potentially oven dry roots on low heat. I think it's probably highly unlikely that someone is able to do this in prison but worth mentioning just in case you can.

To maximise your drying success make sure that:

- You are harvesting plants on a dry day if possible.
- If a plant isn't likely to be sprayed by chemicals or be near fumes etc I would maybe not wash them simply because getting them wet will make them so much harder to dry. Especially if you've only got a small window of time to try them out before a screw gets their eye on them.
- If you are drying roots I would recommend cutting them up into small thin

bits that dry out more easily.

You will know when something is dry because it will be quite ‘crisp’ and will break apart easily (if it’s a leaf or above ground part). Roots will also feel dry but you might not be able to break them up in the same way, but they will feel dry and firm to the touch.

Storing dried herbs

If you manage to dry plants out then storing them is the next challenge. I know prisoners are pretty good at this so I’m not going to reveal all the secrets! In terms of containers, if it’s possible to find them, glass jars are the best because they have good lids that can keep the air out. So make sure you ask people on the wing for their spent peanut butter jars! I would also store my dried dandelion roots at the bottom of my cereal box which wasn’t often searched. Any container that can keep moisture out is what you want.

SECTION 1: THE PLANTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE PLANT PROFILES

This first part of the book contains plant profiles. These are an overview of different plants with information about their medicinal and edible properties, how to harvest and prepare them, and some interesting folklore. The profiles also contain advice on how to identify the plants. Below I have tried to clarify what some of the other sections mean:

Botanical names: Plants, like many things within the context of a Eurocentric, colonial history, have been through a process of classification, come to be called taxonomy. Carl Linnaeus, an 18th Century Swedish botanist, physician, and zoologist formalised this modern system of naming plants and animals. This classification occupies a complicated territory — it is part of the naming, controlling, ordering and theft that happened under white colonial expansion, and it has some use in terms of creating a common language for patterns and identification.

Botanical names can be useful because it means people from all over the world can communicate about a plant and know they are talking about the same one. Because there are so many amazing folk names for plants in all different regions, using botanical names helps us to classify certain plants. Latin is often used for botanical names because it is a ‘dead’ language that is no longer changing. Though at times cumbersome, botanical names can also hold useful information - sharing glimpses into medicinal attributes. For example, Motherwort is called *Leonurus cardiaca* and cardiac means relating to the heart.

This scientific classification gives the genus and then species name in Latin. ie *Achillea millefolium*. Of course we often know plants more by their common

or folk names, in this case, Yarrow. All the names for the plants, scientific and folk, can be a source of information about the plants use. Comfrey whose folk name is Knitbone can be used to heal fractures and bone breaks. Coltsfoot, a lung herb, grows in the shape of a colts foot and its Latin name *Tussilago farfara* means cough dispeller.

Plant family: Classification of groups of plants into ‘families’ can sometimes tell us about the nutritional and medicinal actions of the herbs that are classified together in one family. It can also help with identifying plants we are unsure about as we may recognise certain family characteristics.

Other species: These are listed because you might be in a region with different species of similar plants that share similar properties. Knowing the plant families and similar species can give us clues to the properties of plants we might encounter.

Ecological role: I always like to include notes on the ecological role that plants play because it helps me to be less anthropocentric (human-focused) and remember that plants are there also for the birds and the bees and to help the soil in different ways, amongst other reasons. Knowing where to find a plant, also really helps - for example, knowing that daisies prefer shortly cut lawns means this is where we will start our search.

Chemical constituents: I know these can look like a list of long geeky words, but I also know that prisons are full of incredibly smart people who love learning about science. Constituents are some of the chemicals and compounds found in certain plants, they can help us understand how plants work medicinally. There is an incredibly fascinating world of plant chemistry.

Temperature: All plants have a different action upon the temperature in the body. Some are very cooling, eating them may make us feel colder and if for example, we have very hot inflammation on our skin, we might appreciate this cooling action. Others can be very warming - for example, if we are sick with a bad cold and have the ‘chills’, a warming herb might be exactly what we need. Knowing the temperature of a plant can help us make a decision about whether it will help us or not. For example, being cold and then taking even more cooling

herbs might not be a good idea.

Moisture: Herbs can also have different effects on our bodies in terms of moisture. Some plants may be very drying - they can work to make us sweat or pee more (a diuretic) so they have an overall drying effect on our bodies. Others can be very moistening, for example, if we have dry or hard stools and tense constipation, certain plants can help 'lube' us up bringing more moisture to the tissues. Or if we have a dry hacking cough, we want something silky and smooth to soothe our mucous membranes.

Tissue state: Tissue states are a whole world of learning in herbal medicine and there are books dedicated to understanding them. I have included them for reference purposes in case people would like to learn more. An incredibly brief summary of them might be that there are different ways that tissues in our bodies experience illness and that the tissue states indicate certain excesses or deficiencies. The list of tissue states in these plant profiles are the tissue states that these plants can be very useful for. For example:

- *Heat/Excitation* - There may be a lot of actual heat, such as a fever, inflammation, or a rash. Or things may be running faster than normal - this would be like agitation or overstimulation (emotionally or physiologically, such as heart palpitations). A herb that is warming can warm up a cold situation or get things that have slowed down moving again. A health situation that has a lot of heat may benefit from a cooling or relaxing herb.

- *Damp/Stagnation* - Imagine a swamp that is damp water hanging around going smelly! This often occurs because the body cannot eliminate fluids or waste products well. This can also lead to inflammation as the body tries to deal with the stuck fluid. Herbs that can stimulate circulation and lymphatic movement can help move things that are stuck or stagnant. Astringent herbs can also be helpful.

- *Damp/Relaxation* - This is where tissue is so relaxed it can no longer hold form or fluids. For example, organ prolapse, varicose veins or a flabby tongue. Or similarly excess fluid loss like diarrhoea or excessive sweating. This can also create a similarly 'swampy' environment prone to disease. For this tissue state,

herbs that are useful are those that can help tone the tissues. These are often called astringents and their tannin content effectively tightens tissues up.

When herbs have damp actions, we call this moistening, or demulcent. Moistening herbs are perfect when you have dried out situations, for softening things that have become hardened, and for feeling dehydrated.

- *Dry/Atrophy* - Think of a desert! Here is where there is a lack of fluids such as water or oil, which longer-term can lead to a lack of function (atrophy). For this tissue state, we'd want oily and demulcent herbs. Sometimes a gentle astringent herb can also help tone tissues to stop more fluids being lost.

- *Cold/Depression* - A sensation of coldness as well as a general under activity, for example, constipation, emotional depression, or the immune system being unable to get a fever going to respond to viruses and so forth. Herbs recommended for this state will be warming and stimulating.

- *Wind/Tension* - Imagine a guitar string that's wound up too tight. Too much tension can constrict things like the circulation of blood or body fluids, often leading to irritability, muscle tension and spasms. For this state, we want herbs that can relax excess tension.

- *Laxity* - Laxity is when things are much too relaxed. Often this comes along with dampness or dryness, because in general, too much relaxation means your water will flow in weird ways. But laxity can show up elsewhere - in muscles that don't get enough movement, or in a mind that just can't hold a train of thought. Even in the immune system when your defences can't keep you from getting sick. Gentle astringents may be appropriate, as well as nutritive herbs.

You can definitely have more than one of these at the same time. Just choose the herbs that address whatever is most uncomfortable, and make adjustments as you go. In the end, all herbs share some qualities in common: most have anti-inflammatory actions, most have nutritional benefits, and most herbs can help strengthen your body's innate ability to find balance. So if you can't get exactly what you wish you could, work with what you have!

Herbal actions: This list is the medical community's understanding of how herbs work. They can give us an understanding the wide range of actions the plants can have in the body. There is a glossary at the back of the book that explains what these actions mean.

Health challenges: I have listed the general health conditions and challenges that the plants are commonly used for 'on the out'.

How to practically use them in prison: I have then written how they can directly be used in a prison context, with recommendations on how to prepare them and different dosages.



DANDELION: LION'S TOOTH

Latin name: *Taraxacum officinale*

Plant family: Asteraceae (daisy family)

Identification: Dandelions generally don't need an introduction! Most folks will recognise the yellow flowers and toothed leaves. However, dandelion can be easily mistaken for Cat's ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*) also known as 'false dandelion'. You can tell the difference because Cat's ear's stems are solid (unlike Dandelions) and the leaves are more hairy and deeply lobed.

Other species: There are more than 200 species of dandelion, all are useful. Other common species are *Taraxacum magellanicum*, *Taraxacum mongolicum*, and *Leontodon taraxacum*.

Folk names in English: Lion's tooth, Piss-in-bed, blow ball, tell-time, clock flower, bitterwort, Irish daisy, puff ball, wild endive. In Somerset, dandelion has been called 'fluffy puffy'.

Taraxacum is derived from the Greek "taraxos" meaning disorder and "akos" meaning remedy. In French, Dandelion is 'dent de lion' or the teeth of a lion. Its glorious yellow flowers remind us of the sun. In terms of astroherbology, the herb can be associated with Leo (the lion), Jupiter and the Sun. In Chinese, the translated name reads as 'yellow-flowered-earth-nail'.

Food and nutrition: Dandelion has a bitter taste but its leaves are delicious and nutritious and can be eaten year round (though taste nicer when young in the spring). Dandelion flowers can also be eaten-year round. The roots are also quite delicious fried up. The plant is high in iron, manganese, phosphorous,

protein, sodium and vitamin A in the form of carotenes (1). The roots are also an excellent source of inulin. The roots can be stir-fried, added to soup, made into dips, cooked with potatoes and more. Its rich minerals are often extracted into vinegars which can then be added to foods such as salad dressings. It's well known for dandelion coffee too to be made from its roasted roots. In the north of England, the traditional drink of dandelion and burdock is still made. Dandelion flowers have also been used to make beers and wines.

Ecological role: Dandelion is an all-season bee food. Bumblebees, solitary bees and honeybees all visit dandelions for food, along with hoverflies, beetles, and butterflies. The leaves are eaten by many animals, especially rabbits. In terms of soil, dandelions can often indicate compaction, which their roots can often be trying to address through creating more passageways for air and water.

Any herbal textbook will write how dandelions are said to originate from Eurasia but have spread worldwide through human movement and colonisation. However, indigenous scholar Valerie Goodness, who is of Tsalagi and Ojibwe heritage writes how stories about dandelions have been told by Native Peoples of Turtle Island for thousands of years(2). As part of decolonising our plant knowledge, it's important to note how certain stories about plants get reproduced because traditional ecological knowledge is so undervalued in settler colonialism.

Chemical constituents:

- Leaf: Vitamin A, B, C and D, sesquiterpene lactones, triterpenes, coumarins, carotenoids, minerals especially potassium, flavonoids
- Root: Bitter-taraxacin, monohydric acids – taraxasterol and homotaraxasterol, fatty acids, sugars, inulin (3).

Energetics

Taste: The leaf tastes bitter, when you first eat wild plants it might feel more of a shock, but once you are seasoned to eating wild greens, you'll realise dandelions actually taste quite mild! You can also reduce the bitter taste by blanching them. The root is bitter and sweet.

Temperature: Cold

Moisture: Moist

Tissue State: Hot/Excitation, Damp/Stagnation

Herbal actions:

- Leaf: alterative, anodyne, antacid, antioxidant, aperient, astringent, bitter, decongestant, depurative, digestive, diuretic, febrifuge, galactagogue, hypotensive, immune stimulant, laxative, lithotriptic, nutritive, restorative, stomachic, tonic, vulnerary.
- Root: alterative, anodyne, antibacterial, antifungal, anti-inflammatory, antirheumatic, aperient, astringent, bitter, cholagogue, cholaretic, decongestant, deobstruent, depurative, digestive, discutient, diuretic, galactagogue, hepatic, hypnotic, immune stimulant, laxative, lithotriptic, nutritive, purgative, sedative, stomachic, tonic.
- Flower: anodyne, cardiotonic, emollient, hepatic, vulnerary.
- Sap: anodyne, antifungal, discutient.

Health challenges supported by Dandelion:

Supporting the digestive system: Dandelion is known as a bitter. Bitters are used in herbalism to aid digestion. Herbalists Julie and Mathew Seal describe how the bitter tastes stimulate the secretion of digestive fluids, including stomach acid, bile and pancreatic juices. Dandelion promotes the appetite and is useful for those who have been ill or have lost their enthusiasm for food in advanced age (4). Dandelion can be taken before and after meals to aid digestion. It's useful for constipation, gas, and indigestion. Herbalist Mark Pedersen describes how dandelion contains inulin and mucilage which soothe the digestive tract, absorb toxins from ingested food and regulate the colonies of intestinal bacteria which produce toxins intended to kill other bacteria. That is, they help friendly flora and inhibit unfriendly bacteria (1). Recent research has also shown dandelion to be potentially useful for diabetes.

Liver support: Dandelion is a supreme ally for liver health. Herbalist Kami McBride describes dandelion's actions on the liver really clearly: "It stimulates the flow of bile, which breaks down cholesterol and fat. Dandelion nurtures the liver in its assimilation and storage of vitamins, minerals and sugars. It improves blood filtration to remove old cells and harmful bacteria and helps maintain a healthy hormone balance. Liver health also plays an important role in regulating blood sugar and excreting accumulated waste. We are endowed with a liver that performs a thousand functions. It is just plain courteous to eat some herbs to

reciprocate all the liver does to make us happy” (5)

Its support for the liver can be really useful for people during and in recovery from drug and alcohol use. Herbalist Alexis J. Cunningham says that Dandelion is especially useful when combined with other herbs that help clear environmental toxins, such as Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)(6). This includes being useful for people during and in recovery from cancer treatments.

As a diuretic: Despite being associated with bed wetting, Dandelion actually strengthens the urinary system. Unlike many diuretics (any substance that promotes diuresis, the increased production of urine), which contribute to a loss of potassium, Dandelion does not cause this imbalance because it is rich in potassium and can therefore be more safely used long-term. Its diuretic actions can support folks with swollen ankles, fluid retention and high blood pressure. This action also supports the elderly with shortness of breath.

Supporting muscles and joints: An infused oil of dandelion flowers can support muscle tension, as well as cold and stiff joints when applied topically on the skin. Dandelion also has the ability to aid the removal of uric acid from the body making it good for treating gout and joint disease. It can therefore aid rheumatism, arthritis and other connective tissue conditions when inflammatory substances need to be moved. The bitter flavonoids in dandelion relieve muscle spasms and reduce inflammation (4).

Supporting the skin: Dandelion sap (in accessible quantity from inside the stems) can be applied directly to warts, stings and blisters. Please note some folks react to the latex in the sap.

Pre-menstrual symptoms: For folks who menstruate and who can often feel those feelings of extreme frustration/anger/upset, Dandelion can really help ‘cool’ you down. It can also help with water retention and release pelvic congestion. Eating a few dandelion flowers can also help relieve a headache.

How to practically use Dandelion in prison

Where you might find dandelion: Dandelions are often found pushing through the concrete - look for them next to curbs or edges of paths and beds.

They can also be found anywhere there is bare soil. They prefer the sun so won't be hiding in damp corners the way that plants like nettles will. However, you really can find them everywhere and often in the most unexpected places.

Leaves and flowers

Nutrition - eat dandelion leaves and flowers as part of your meals for their nutritional benefits - you can add them to sandwiches and rolls, or mix them in with whatever stew, curry or sludge you've been served.

Digestion (constipation, gas etc) - you can also eat dandelion leaves separately before or after your meals to help with digestion. Amongst other actions in the body, they will help stimulate the secretion of bile meaning you can digest your food more easily. If you have been able to dry the leaves, then making a leaf infusion with dried leaves and drinking 1/2-2 cups per day (about 125 - 500ml per day) can really help with any digestive issues. Even if you do not struggle with digestive issues, in a prison context, just that extra support for your liver in processing the chronic stress is really powerful. Likewise, prison food can take its toll on the body with huge amounts of oil use and so forth.

Headaches - eat a few dandelion flowers or leaves to help relieve a headache.

Worts, stings and blisters - you can apply the sap directly by opening the dandelion stem (you'll see some nice gooey white stuff) and applying it to wherever needed. Note that some people can react to the latex in the stem.

Skin irritation (such as swollen and weepy rashes, eczema and acne) - add the leaves and/or flowers in hot water - for example in a cup or a bowl. Let them steep for at least 10 minutes and then wash the irritated skin with the water from the cup/bowl.

Sprains and bruises - make a strong tea from fresh or dried dandelion leaves, strain it and drink the liquid, then apply the plant material directly on the skin as a poultice. You can also soak make-shift bandages with dandelion tea and wrap around the sprained area.

Period pains - eat dandelion flowers and leaves, or add them to hot water

as a tea to help relieve period pains.

For general skin care and beauty - steep the flower heads in water for an hour (keep the cup/bowl covered) and then strain (but keep both the water and the flowers). Lie down and put the warm wet flowers on your face for ten minutes then remove and rinse your face with the water. You can also leave the water on overnight for stronger results. Natural toner!

Roots

If you are able to access the roots:

Liver support - if you can dry them (see my top tips on page 21) then 1/2-2 cups per day (about 125 - 500ml per day) of dried dandelion root infusion is a really powerful help for people with liver issues. Dandelions can help people having conventional treatment for hepatitis, jaundice or those struggling with liver damage from excess drug or alcohol use. It can also help people having chemotherapy (or in recovery from it). Dandelion is your friend! It feeds your liver choline, carotenes, mineral salts and other nutrients it needs to aid in its restoration.

Otherwise, fresh dandelion root juice is also superb, 3-6 tablespoons per day. Making juice is obviously pretty hard without a juicer! However, in prison there are a couple of options - if you know anybody who works in the prison kitchen who can access sharp knives or equipment, who can blend up the roots for you, this is ideal. If not, you can try soaking the roots and tearing them apart/ bashing them against something and chopping them up as much as you can with your cutlery then squeezing the juice through a piece of fabric, like a cloth/ clean underwear/corner of a bedsheet or something.

Rheumatic and arthritic joints - try the juice above diluted in water. Drink it 1-2 times a day for 8 weeks.

Insomnia - a soothing warm root infusion, combined with a little bit of milk/soya milk if you have some, can help you sleep.

Chronic chest pain, bronchitis, pneumonia and tuberculosis - dandelion root infusions can help nourish, soothe and heal the mucous membranes in the lungs for people already having treatment for these conditions.

High blood pressure, arteriosclerosis and elevated cholesterol levels

- dandelion root infusions can help to reduce these conditions.

If you can access oil:

I know on the HMP canteen list, in some prisons, people are able to buy sunflower or olive oil. If you do have access to oil, it's possible to infuse dandelion flowers in the oil for two weeks (or as long as you can before your cell gets searched!). To do this make sure you have a very clean jar, fill as much as possible with the flowers. (If the flowers have been dried out slightly, this is even better - as it is super easy for oils to spoil because of too much water). Leave the flowers in there and then strain after a week or two. You'll have a powerful infused oil that can be rubbed on your muscles for back ache and shoulder tension. Or any other aching muscles you have.

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PLANTAIN: SNAKEWEED

Latin name: *Plantago major*, *Plantago lanceolata*

Plant family: Plantaginaceae (plantain family)

Identification: Ribwort plantain (*P. lanceolata*) has low rosettes of narrow, dull or greyish-green, hairy leaves with numerous parallel veins running the length of the leaf. Leaves taper very gradually to their narrow bases and very short stalks. They have short, dense, blackish flower heads (with creaming stamens) on leafless stems. In comparison, Greater plantain (*P. major*) has broader leaves which are hairless or with short hair and taper more abruptly into distinct leaf stalks which can be as long as the leaves themselves. The flower head is long, narrow and green (brown when dead)(1).

Other species: Narrow leaf plantain (*P. minor*), Sea plantain (*P. maritima*), Indian plantain (*P. afra*), Psyllium (*P. ovata*). All 34 species of plantain are edible and medicinal.

Folk names in English: Ribwort plantain (*P. lanceolata*), Greater plantain (*P. major*), Waybread, Snakeweed, Soldiers, Kemps, Fireleaves, White Man's Foot, White Man's Footsteps, Waybroad, Ripple Grass, English man's foot, Broadleaf, Cuckoo's Bread, Rat-tail. Planta in Latin means foot.

Chemical constituents: Iridoid glycosides (aucubin, catalpol); tannins; polysaccharides, (galactose, glucose, xylose, arabinose, and rhamnose IE mucilage); alkaloids (plantagonine, asperuloside); flavonoids (baicalein, apigenin, scutellarin, nepetin, hispidulin, luteolin, plantagoside) (2).

Food and nutrition: All parts of plantain are edible. Mark Pedersen writes in Nutritional Herbology that *Plantago major* seed is very high in calcium, crude fibre, dietary fibre, and fat. It is also high in protein, silicon, sodium and zinc (3). Katrina Blair describes how “plantain seeds are a sustainable food rich in proteins, carbohydrates, fatty acids, amino acids, omega-3 fatty acids and other minerals. The seed coat is made up of 30% mucilage. The mucilage absorbs toxins in the digestive tract and greatly supports effective elimination. The seeds act gently in lubricating the colon with mucilaginous nature, making the perfect food and medicine in one. The plantain seeds are a relative of psyllium seeds (*Plantago ovate*) and have the same gelatinous quality - making a valuable base for thickening soups in recipes, for binding crackers and firming up deserts” (4). *P. lanceolata* is also grown as a perennial salad crop in Italy and other parts of Europe.

Ecological role: Plantain grows on dryish neutral to basic soils, in short, grazed, unimproved grasslands and also in improved grasslands, along hedgerows and roadsides, and on wasteground (1). Plantain is an excellent cover crop for soils harmed by extractive European agriculture or repeated trampling. She also makes good forage for animals domestic or wild. You will see plantain wherever there is bare soil, she is somehow the land’s living plaster.

Plantain is called ‘white man’s footsteps’ because of how it followed European settlers on native land. Robin Wall Kimmerer, author of the beautiful book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, describes plantain: “Our people have a name for this round-leaved plant: White Man’s Footstep. Just a low circle of leaves, pressed close to the ground with no stem to speak of, it arrived with the first settlers and followed them everywhere they went. It trotted along paths through the woods, along wagon roads and railroads, like a faithful dog so as to be near them.” (5)

I love how Hawthorn references plantain as a tool for decolonisation. They write “*Plantago* reminds us that good allies take the back seat. They remain unobtrusive and supportive until called upon. They do not take up extra space or time that others need. Unlike other introduced plants (buckthorn, knotweed, etc.), plantain has not disrupted ecosystems or threatened endangered native species. She only takes up space where there are already empty spots — putting herself at the edge of eroded areas or busy sidewalks. She helps keep the soil healthy by holding it in place and healing compaction but then moves on to allow others to thrive” (6).

Cultivation: Plantain commonly propagates itself via seed, with one source saying that plantain seed can remain viable for up to 60 years! (7) While plantain is generally found on bare and disturbed soils, where it does have access to more fertility it will become impressively lush and large!

Energetics

Temperature: Cooling

Moisture: Astringent and demulcent

Tissue State: Heat/Excitation, Dry/Atrophy, Damp/Stagnation

Taste: Bitter

Herbal actions: Alterative, antibacterial, antidote, astringent, antiseptic, demulcent, deobstruent, diuretic, expectorant, febrifuge, hemostatic, inflammation modulating, moistening expectorant, ophthalmic, vulnerary.

Health challenges supported by Plantain:

Plantain has been used medicinally for thousands of years. It was one of the nine sacred herbs of the Anglo-Saxons, who called plantain “Lacnuga, the mother of worts”. Below are some medicinal uses of plantain:

Topical first aid: Plantain is a supreme ally for wound healing and skin injuries. From bites, cuts, scrapes and stings to puncture wounds, Plantain is your plant! This is because plantain works simultaneously as a fantastic drawing agent and as an astringent and vulnerary. Astringent means that the cells and tissues are contracting and tightening. Vulnerary is another word for wound healing.

In Ireland a single plant leaf served both actions - one side of the leaf was meant to be used for drawing out, and the other side of the leaf for healing (8). Plantain has the ability to suck out dirt, splinters, stings and poisons. I remember being bitten by a spider (or some other mystery insect) while being at a hardcore show after leaving my hoody in a dusty cupboard. I searched outside and even in the middle of the city in Bristol, I found plantain growing through the concrete. I washed it and chewed it up in my mouth before placing it on my bite, and low and behold, I drew out whatever had gotten in there and the swelling subsided.

Plantain also has the ability to treat infected wounds due to its antibacterial and antiseptic actions. Herbalist Sajah Popham writes how, “Plantain applied topically has the ability to draw out that infection, bring fresh blood to the surface, stimulate local immunity, detoxify the area, and provide its own antiseptic properties” (9). It’s super powerful as a ‘spit poultice’. A loved one of mine from Siberia jokes that in Russia, plantain is used for everything, with a comedy sketch that if your arm gets chopped off, just use plantain.

You can also line your socks and shoes with the leaves and it helps prevent blisters. This links to one of its names: ‘Waybread’ as it is found along roadsides and you can use it when you walk long distances.

Leaky gut syndrome: With gut issues almost endemic in our western cultures due to chronic stress, overuse of antibiotics, food allergens and intolerances, non-organic food and pollution, plantain can be an important ally. This is due to it’s astringent and vulnerary action literally healing our internal wounds (imagine the gut lining as our inner skin). Sajah writes, “Once again, we see the combination of astringency/vulnerary actions helping to heal and tonify the lining of the gut, a reduction in inflammation directly on the gut wall but also systemically, a soothing demulcent action, as well as the antiseptic quality helping to alleviate any possible flora imbalances or infection. Plantain is literally like a formula unto itself when it comes to treating leaky gut syndrome! The slight bitterness of the remedy also supports digestion as a whole” (10). If using plantain for gut healing, then similarly to mallow, you need to really cover as much surface area as possible so decoctions or infusions are best.

Constipation: Plantain seeds can help treat constipation, adding a bit of moisture and a bulking laxative to help getting things moving. It is important to also increase fibre intake (e.g. more fruits and vegetables) and stay well hydrated. Doing small self massage circles clockwise around the abdomen while you are lying down can also help. Plantain can also be used for haemorrhoids.

Respiratory Tract infections: Plantain is a fantastic resource for a dry, irritable cough because it is soothing and moistening but also has an expectorant action. An expectorant helps you to bring up phlegm and expel it. It’s great if you have one of those lingering coughs that will not go away easily.

Dental care: Herbalists Julie and Mathew Seal write how a wad of fresh plantain can be placed against sore teeth and gums. Its drawing action is particularly powerful for tooth infections, canker sores or aphthous ulcers. Tea can be held in the mouth, or you can soak cotton wool in a strong infusion or tincture and pack it into the area (9).

Urinary Tract Infections: Sajah describes how plantain is a good herb for urinary tract infections, “The herb is a mild but effective diuretic agent, providing its astringent and mucilaginous properties to the mucosal membranes which line the urinary tract. This makes it highly beneficial for urinary tract infections where there is an excess of irritation, heat, dryness and bleeding. Plantain effectively cools and sedates the heat and inflammation, soothes the irritation, moistens the dryness, astringes the bleeding, assists in drawing out the infection, and also provides an antiseptic action and a bit of local immune stimulation”.

How to practically use Plantain in prison

Where you might find plantain: Plantain is likely to be where people walk, and on the edges of paths and beds. I commonly found it on the edges where the curbs were when we were working in the prison gardens. It might also be growing in beds but it prefers poorer soil.

Fresh leaf

Bites, cuts, scrapes and stings - chew a leaf in your mouth and then apply directly onto the area. Hold there until the pain goes away or until the bleeding stops. You may want to swap to a new leaf if needed, especially if one has already drawn something out of there (like bits of gravel or insect poison).

Bigger wounds - see the wound care section.

Sore teeth and gums, tooth infections and mouth ulcers - you can chew and apply the leaf directly to the sore area and/or you can make a strong tea and hold it and swish it around the mouth.

Haemorrhoids - a strong infusion drunk internally will aid recovery from

haemorrhoids (addressing the root causes, not so much bringing symptomatic relief).

Fresh or dried leaves

Leaky gut syndrome - plantain is most effective at treating leaky gut when combined with other herbs. Commonly combined include calendula (*Calendula officinalis*), Agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*), Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*), Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*), Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) and Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*). I think it is unlikely in prison you would have access to all these plants, however, you might be able to buy chamomile and peppermint on canteen. You would want to make a tea of whatever you can mixed together, or plantain leaf (fresh or dry) on its own and drink it throughout the day. A litre a day would be ideal for several weeks, if not months, if you are trying to recover from leaky gut, irritable bowel syndrome or other inflammatory digestive conditions.

Respiratory infections and dry, irritable coughs - make a cold infusion with plantain leaves to sooth an irritable cough or to help clear a chest infection.

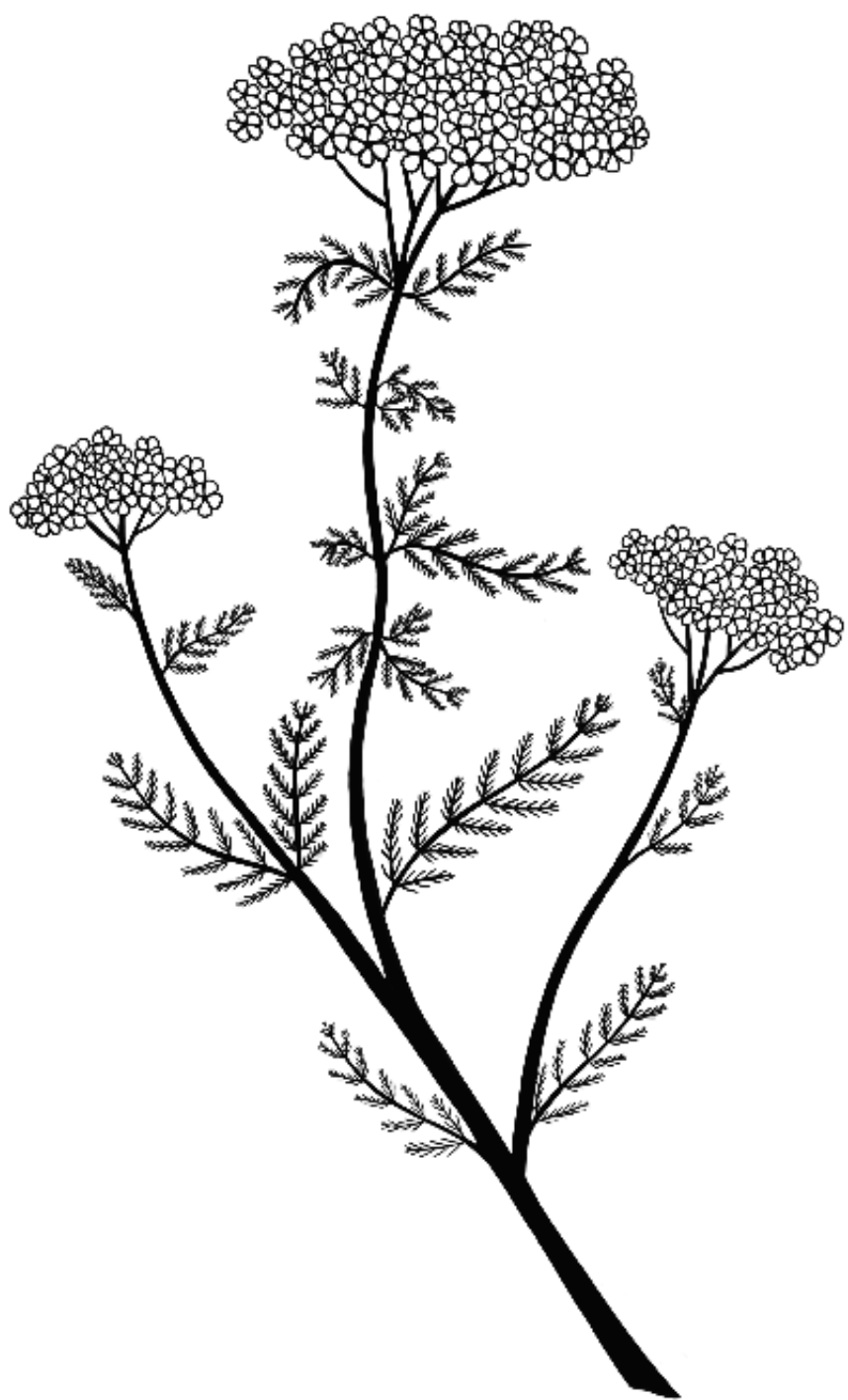
Urinary Tract Infections - plantain is a powerful ally for UTI infections providing that they are hot in nature e.g. burning sensation, dryness, irritation or bleeding. Drink strong infusions of cold plantain. It works well combined with Yarrow too.

Seeds

Constipation - eat the seeds (fresh or dried) for extra roughage.

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YARROW: BAD MAN'S PLAYTHING

Latin name: *Achillea millefolium*

Plant family: Asteraceae (daisy family)

Identification: Yarrow has narrow, darkish-green leaves deeply and intricately cut into short, very thin lobes, the main lobes divided further into smaller ones (2-pinnate) which themselves can be divided (3-pinnate) or toothed. The leaves look like feathers. The short, closely-spaced lobes mean that the leaf as a whole is narrower and with a clearer outline. Stems quite stiff, with dense, branched heads of small white or pale pink flowers in summer or autumn (1).

Other species: There is a vague similarity with Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*) when foraging, however, yarrow is very distinct.

Folk names in English: Soldier's Woundwort, Herbe militaris, Bloodwort, Sanguinary, Staunchweed, Devil's nettle, Devil's plaything, Old man's pepper, Nosebleed, Carpenter's weed, Life medicine, Milfoil, Allheal, Squirrel's tail, Nosebleed, Badman's plaything, Knights Milfoil, Seven-year's love, Yarroway, Englishman's quinine, Carpenter's grass, Thousandleaf, Noble yarrow, Thousand seal, Dog daisy, Field Hop, Little feather, Warrior plant.

Millefolium in Latin means a thousand leaves. Achillea comes from the story of Achilles who used the herb to staunch the blood of soldiers wounded in battle.

Chemical constituents: 5% essential oil including alpha and beta pinenes, borneol, bornyl acetate, borneone, caryophyllene, 1,8- cineole,

eugenol, farnesene, linalool, myrcene, sabinene, salicylic acid, isovalerianic acid, terpineol, sesquiterpene lactones, chamazulene, thujone. Flavonoids apigenin, luteolin, quercetin, and their glycosides, artemetin, casticin, rutin and others). Tannins, bitter glyco-alkaloid achillein/betonicine, stachydrine, achiceine, moschatine, trigonelline etc. Miscellaneous acetylenes, aldehydes, cycitols, plant acids, resins, achillic acid, asparagines, choline, polyacetylenes; coumarins, triterpenes, cyanogenic glycosides (2).

Food and nutrition: Yarrow has been used to brew beer, as tobacco and in salads and soups. Herbalist Mark Pedersen's nutritional profile of yarrow shows it is very high in chromium and tin, and high in ash, fat, potassium, riboflavin, selenium, thiamine and vitamin C (3).

Ecological role: Yarrow can be found on dry to moist, neutral, basic or mildly acidic soils in unimproved or semi-improved grasslands in lowlands and uplands. Also on sand dunes and disturbed ground (1). It's fantastic for insects, attracting bees, wasps, moths, butterflies, flies and beetles. Medicinal herb farmers, Jeff and Melanie Carpenter, write that growers can take advantage of yarrow's incredible insectary power by planting it in proximity to other plants that are prone to damage from herbivorous insects or diseases they carry with them (4).

Cultivation: The Carpenters plant yarrow at 12-inch spaces in rows fourteen inches apart with three rows in a bed. Yarrow will soon create a dense carpet over the soil. They are generally harvested in the early stages of flowering.

Energetics

Temperature: Cooling

Moisture: Dry

Tissue State: Hot/Excitation, Damp/Stagnation, Damp/Relaxation

Taste: Bitter, pungent, astringent

Herbal actions: Anti-inflammatory, anti-haemorrhagic, antipyretic, antiseptic (especially for urinary system), antispasmodic, astringent, emmenagogue, diaphoretic, diuretic, haemostatic, hypotensive/amphoteric for

blood pressure, spasmolytic, styptic, vasolidator (2).

Health challenges supported by Yarrow:

Bleeding, Wound Care and First aid: Yarrow is potentially the most famous wound herb due to its styptic action of stopping bleeding (internally and externally) from small cuts to internal bleeding and haemorrhage. One of yarrow's folk names is nosebleed because it's traditionally been used during nosebleeds, where people simply roll up some fresh leaves and stuff it up their noses! You can also simply chew up fresh leaves and apply to a wound.

Yarrow is powerful for all stages of the wound healing process, from being a styptic (stopping bleeding) to increasing circulation whereby blood and necessary immunity actors are moved to a wounded area, to proliferation and granulation (where new tissue starts to form).

If you don't have any fresh yarrow you can use dried yarrow that is rehydrated with water (don't use powders directly on a wound!). For example, you can make it into a poultice or soak a cloth in a tea. It is also great to wash a wound with yarrow tea. Herbalist Sajah Popham describes "So making a tea of yarrow leaf and/or flower (strained) can be great to soak and soften a wound aiding in clearing out debris, disinfecting it, reducing excess inflammation (and pain) and help with the regeneration of new cellular growth" (5).

Bleeding gums: Yarrow tea swished around in your mouth will have antimicrobial action, will stop the bleeding right away and prevent infection. Herbalist Michael Moore also says that chewing the fresh root or applying the tincture topically after a tooth extraction really helps.

Colds, Flu and Fevers: For years, I would intuitively combine yarrow, elderflower and mint every time I was developing a cold. I was then nicely surprised as I found it referenced as a combination with a long traditional use! I usually just add the dried herbs together with hot water to steep and then strain. Yarrow is a diaphoretic and helps the body to sweat and do what it needs to do to fight an infection (rather than suppressing it). Sajah says "Yarrow is a critical remedy for colds and fevers, especially when someone feels nauseous and experiences periodic fever," further adding, "I think yarrow

is one of the most dynamic remedies for treatment of acute infection with a broad range of application (respiratory, urinary, digestive, blood, circulatory, fever, topical etc).”

Fungal and microbial infections: Sajah writes that yarrow is full of aromatic volatile oils that display antimicrobial and antifungal actions both topically and internally. This is in combination with its diaphoretic property makes it useful in a wide variety of pathogenic infections both systematically and locally, especially for infected wounds in combination with its vulnerary property.

Menstruation: Yarrow is an emmenagogue which means it promotes menstrual flow, it does this in part by stimulating circulation of the blood in the pelvis. It is also a menstrual regulator through this action, and by clearing the liver with its bitter taste so supporting hormonal balance in the body. Amazingly, yarrow can also be used not just to promote menstruation, but to reduce it, acting intelligently to support the body. Julie and Mathew Seal write, “the special ability to both stop bleeding and break up stagnant blood makes yarrow a valuable menstrual remedy. It will correct both heavy and suppressed periods and will normalise blood flow if there is clotting.” (6) It is used to treat abnormally heavy bleeding as well as vaginal leucorrhea (whitish or yellowish discharge).

Digestive system: Sajah states how yarrow has an affinity for the liver, spleen, stomach and works specifically for hepatic portal vein congestion of the body. This is predominantly through both its bitter and carminative properties. Yarrow promotes secretions, alleviating and dispersing tension held in the gut moving out stagnation, cooling heat and stimulating digestion. He also adds, “Yarrow will be helpful when someone has had chronic relaxation of the bowels, like diarrhoea, as the tissues don’t have enough tonal quality to hold in fluids and the stool. Drinking Yarrow tea can be useful for conditions such as leaky gut syndrome, symbiosis, irritation of the intestines, and bacterial infections as Yarrow’s virtues all work to improve the integrity of the tissues.” Yarrow is also anti-microbial against *Shigella* bacteria.

Joint inflammation: Yarrow is not only powerful for inflammation in wounds but also longer-term conditions. Michael Moore describes how yarrow

can be used for joint inflammations caused by rheumatoid arthritis and other low-level autoimmune or allergic conditions that settle in the joints.

Urinary infections: Yarrow is useful for urinary tract infections (UTIs) that cause painful, burning urination. It can kill bacteria while simultaneously toning tissues. It also has the diaphoretic properties that help the body respond to all manner of infections. Herbalist Stephen Harrod Buhner's book includes research that shows how the compounds in yarrow have proven effective against a number of organisms that are associated with UTIs including *Candida albicans*, *Escherichia Coli* and *Streptococcus faecalis* (7). Yarrow is also useful for people experiencing urinary difficulties from a swollen prostate.

For circulatory conditions: Yarrow has an incredible affinity for the blood and can be used to treat conditions such as varicose veins, hypotension, hypertension and thrombosis. Sajah describes yarrow's actions on the blood: "Yarrow is used effectively to tone the blood vessels in the peripheral capillaries and veins. Paradoxically, it not only tones and astringes but also acts as a vasodilator, opening up the vessels and allows for more blood to move through the system, thus bringing more nutrients and oxygen to areas that may be lacking."

Haemorrhoids: Yarrow has a traditional use for haemorrhoids due to its astringency. Sajah says the astringency from the tannins makes it excellent both internally and externally, as it will tighten up the tissue, stop the bleeding, reduce inflammation and pain, and shrink the haemorrhoid itself. It can be added to a sitz bath and also be used internally.

If all these incredible medicinal uses aren't enough, yarrow is also known in folk medicine as a tool for love divination. Nigel G. Pearson writes how if yarrow would be wrapped in a flannel sachet and placed under a pillow at night then that person will dream of their future lover. Yarrow was also hung over newborn babies as a form of protection magic (8). Elisabeth Brooke describes it as a herb for those fighting injustice, with yarrow as protective battle armour (9). Yarrow stalks are also used in the Chinese I Ching divination.

Cautions: Yarrow is not recommended for people who are pregnant because of its emmenagogue action. Yarrow can cause skin reactions in some people and in large doses can cause headaches. It can also decrease drug absorption because of its ability to increase gut motility.

How to practically use Yarrow in prison

Where you might find yarrow: I found yarrow in the gravelled areas of prison paths, especially in the areas further out between fences. It was also up against the curbs in any cracks it could find.

Fresh leaf

Cuts and wounds - chew up a leaf and then place directly on the cut. See also the dedicated wound section.

Nosebleeds - roll up fresh leaves and put up the nose until the bleeding stops.

Bleeding gums - make a tea with the fresh leaf and/or flowers and then swish it around in your mouth.

Colds, flu and fevers - add yarrow leaves and/or flowers to hot water and leave to infuse then strain it, but make sure you drink it while it is still hot. It will help you to sweat out a fever so don't be alarmed if you sweat more or feel hotter. Keep making and drinking the tea every few hours until you feel better.

Periods - you can drink yarrow tea to help bring on your period. If your period is very heavy - you can drink yarrow tea to help normalise the flow.

If you have vaginal discharge - you can also drink yarrow tea regularly to help clear up any infection and tone yourself down below

Gut issues such as leaky gut, irritable bowel and so forth - drink yarrow tea regularly. For diarrhoea - drink yarrow tea.

Painful burning urination and urinary tract infections - drink strong yarrow tea.

Swollen prostate - drink yarrow tea.

Haemorrhoids - you can make a sitz bath. This is where you fill a container with water (large enough to place your butt in), so like the same size as a washing up bowl ideally, but obviously, in prison, you'll have to improvise. Make a strong yarrow infusion/tea and add to the warm water and then sit in it for 20 minutes. If you can't make a sitz bath you could also just add fresh or dried yarrow to a normal bath, or don't fill the bath completely full but enough to cover your backside. You can also help recover from haemorrhoids by drinking yarrow tea internally for a number of weeks.

Joint pain - drink yarrow tea.

Varicose veins, hypotension, hypertension and thrombosis - drink yarrow tea.

Toothache - While I don't suggest digging up the roots if there are limited plants available, if there is an abundance you can use the fresh root for toothache by directly chewing it.

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CHICKWEED: STARWEED

Latin name: *Stellaria media*

Plant family: Caryophyllaceae (carnation family)

Identification: Small, white, star-like flowers that have 5 petals. A single line of hairs on stems. Low growing, clump-forming from 10-40cm. The herb blooms from March until November, however, in our changing climate I have found it in flower in early January.

Other species: There are lots of similar chickweeds and stitchworts. Mouse ears (*Cerastium spp.*) have similar flowers and petals but are hairy all over).

Folk names in English: Starweed, flíodh (Irish), cosmopolitan weed, chick wittles, clucken wort, chickney weed, tongue grass, winterweed, satinflower, white birds eye, adder's mouth, stichwort and shirt buttons. Stellar means star in Latin, as seen in the gorgeous tiny star-shaped flowers this plant has.

Chemical constituents: Minerals, including silica, vitamin C, A, B, mucilage, saponins, fatty acids (1).

Food and nutrition: Chickweed was once sold as a vegetable on the streets of London. It is delicious raw and in salads but can also be added to dishes like tabouli, soups, pestos and curries. Chickweed can be very high in aluminium, iron, magnesium, manganese, silicon and zinc. It is also high

in calcium, cobalt, phosphorous, potassium, protein, sodium and vitamin A (2). I commonly make chickweed vinegar as vinegar is a great way to extract minerals.

Ecological role: Chickweed is an annual plant. Ben Averis references chickweed as being found mainly on nutrient-rich soils in disturbed places, waste ground, roadsides, field margins, gardens, stony seashores and seabird cliffs (3). In my experience, chickweed mostly grows on bare soils, where the soil is likely contaminated or low-nutrient, chickweed will be sparse and small. When it's a garden bed with a soil rich in organic matter, chickweed will grow across like a carpet and be incredibly happy spreading wider and wider.

Folklore: In Hatfield's Herbal, chickweed is described as a weather forecaster: When its flowers and leaves open fully, good weather can be expected: 'If it should shut up, the traveller is to put on his greatcoat!'. Apparently, even the seed capsules close up tightly in wet weather (4)

Cultivation: I have never grown chickweed from seed, as it always springs up everywhere! If you want to introduce it then its best directly sowing by seed into the soil, ideally with some compost. Once you have it, it will self-sow.

Energetics

Temperature: Cool

Moisture: Moist

Tissue State: Dry/Atrophy, Damp/Stagnation

Taste: Chickweed tastes very 'grassy'. It is quite sweet and moist with a very gentle bitterness.

Herbal actions: Alterative, anti-inflammatory, antipruritic, antiseptic, astringent, carminative, demulcent, discutient, diuretic, emollient, expectorant, febrifuge, hepatic, laxative, mucolytic, nutritive, pectoral, refrigerant, vulnerary.

Health challenges supported by Chickweed

Skin complaints: Externally, chickweed has been used to soothe itches,

bites, stings, inflammations, burns, swellings, sunburn, bruises and splinters (5). It can be made into a skin lotion or infused oil for itching and inflamed skin, as well as being made into a poultice. Chickweed has a cooling and drawing action. When made into a poultice, chickweed can be used for its drawing function on boils and abscesses. Be sure to replace every few hours.

Chickweed can be added to baths and soaks if the area of inflamed skin is extensive. Herbalist Mark Pedersen describes how externally the saponins help solubilise toxins in abscesses and rashes and helps increase the effectiveness of bactericides by increasing the permeability of the cell walls (2).

In their incredible overview of medicinal plant records in Britain and Ireland, David E. Allen and Gabrielle Hatfield describe the many uses of chickweed referenced in historical documents: “By far the commonest of those is in the form of a mat, as a hot and relaxing poultice to reduce swellings, including those of sprains and mumps and other forms of inflammation. Most records share similar uses of chickweed for the skin and inflammation, however, it is also described as a significant remedy for insomnia in the Scottish Highlands” (6).

Irritated and hot conditions: Chickweed’s primary cooling and anti-itch actions can be used for absolutely any hot irritated itchy conditions. This includes thrush, haemorrhoids, rashes and eczema. It can also be a very cooling plant for ‘hot and fiery’ people in general who need to cool and channel their fire.

For inflamed eyes: Chickweed is an ally for eye inflammation including itchiness.

As a cleanser and restorer: Chickweed can also support inflammatory conditions internally. Herbalists Julie Bruton-Seal and Mathew Seal say that saponins work at a cellular level to increase absorption and permeability. What this means is that inflamed organ membranes, as in the liver, kidney and lungs are helped by saponins to absorb healing nutrients, as well as allowing their wastes and blockages to be more easily removed. They continue to say that chickweed works well internally on hot inflammatory problems like gastritis, colitis, congested chest, blocked kidneys and gallbladder, and piles. They say it has an affinity for the lungs, for sore throats, bronchitis, asthma, irritable, dry coughs and other respiratory conditions (5). According to herbalist Zoe Hawes,

Chickweed can also be dried and made into infusions for rheumatic conditions (7). An Old Wives Tale is that chickweed can be used as an ally to lose weight, which some herbalists attribute to how it stimulates the metabolism and the break down of fat (8).

Cysts: Chickweed can also be made into a fresh herb tincture. Chickweed tincture, when used for extended periods, can dissolve cysts, especially ovarian cysts (1).

Cautions: Zoe Hawes says do not take chickweed if you have bleeding of the stomach or intestines as chickweed may aggravate this condition. An extreme or excessive intake can cause vomiting or diarrhoea (1).

Combines well with: A really nice salve for eczema, skin rashes and psoriasis can be made with chickweed, chamomile and plantain. Chickweed also combines well with nettle and meadowsweet for rheumatic diseases (7).

How to practically use Chickweed in prison

Where you might find chickweed: Chickweed is going to be growing on the soil rather than in a path or in a crack in the wall. You might find it living under other plants, it's very low growing. It will like to be on bare soil rather than in grass.

Nutrition - add chickweed to your food, whether it's raw in salads or sandwiches, or thrown in when you are eating curry or stews, or whatever gloop you are served up! I remember being given a single bread roll with a packet of Marmite (which I hate) for dinner over the weekends in prison when we had early bang-up. So it would be a good time to whip out the greens I had saved from the prison garden and eat them with bread.

Make a vinegar - in some prisons, malt vinegar is available to buy on the canteen. Vinegar has an amazing ability to extract minerals from plants. See guidelines for how to make a herbal vinegar in the medicine making section. You'll be left with vinegar that is full of minerals which you can use on food or add a splash of it to hot water.

Boils and abscesses - generally, on the outside, ointments would be made up of chickweed for skin conditions. However, in prison, you can make fresh poultices and apply on to boxils and abscesses.

Rashes and skin complaints like sunburn or eczema - you can add chickweed to your bath and/or make a strong infusion of chickweed and then add it to your bath. If a bath is not possible you can also place it on wherever is affected with a compress (soak some material in the infusion and place it over the area). The juice pulp can also be applied to any area of the skin to soothe irritation.

Sprains - soak a compress in a strong chickweed infusion and wrap around the sprain.

Itchy or inflamed eyes - mash up the fresh plant and apply the juicy pulp to a closed eye. After 10-20 minutes, or when the poultice becomes warm, remove the poultice and apply a fresh poultice of chickweed. For best results, this can be repeated multiple times and over the course of several days.

Joint pain and rheumatism - drink chickweed tea internally.

Chest infections, sore throats and dry coughs - drink a strong chickweed tea, you can also use the tea as a mouthwash to swish and spit.

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4. Hatfield's Herbal, Gabrielle Hatfield
5. Hedgerow Medicine, Julie Bruton-Seal and Mathew Seal
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MALLOW: CHEESECAKE

Latin name: *Malva sylvestris*

Plant family: Malvaceae (mallow family)

Identification: Tall and upright (to 1m) or rather creeping. Leaves are up to 12cm across, long stalks and commonly a dark spot on the base of the leaf blade. Flowers are 2.5 - 4cm across (1). Mallows have five flower petals. The flowers of common mallow are whitish to light pink in colour and have pink stripes running up each petal on the flower. Mallow flowers are bisexual, meaning both the female and male reproductive plants are in every flower. In the centre of the flower, the pistil sticks out. The ovary is located at the base of the petals and eventually ripens to produce the cheese wheel-like fruits. The fruits are circular and look like a miniature round block of cheese (2).

Other species: The most commonly used species of the mallow family for medicinal purposes is Marshmallow (*Althaea officinalis*). However, there are many related useful species including musk mallow (*Malva moschata*), dwarf mallow (*M. neglecta*), cheeseweed mallow (*M. parviflora*), bull mallow (*M. nicaeensis*), dwarf mallow (*M. rotundifolia*), hibiscus (*Hibiscus spp.*), hollyhock (*Alcea rose*), desert scarlet globe allow (*Spaeralecea coccinea*), okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*), Indian mallow (*Abutilon incanum*), Chingma (*A. theophrasti*). Cocoa and cotton are also in the mallow family. Other species of the British Isles include Cornish Mallow (*Lavatera cretica*), rough mallow (*Malva setigera*) and Tree mallow (*Lavatera maritima*).

Folk names in English: High Mallow, Tall Mallow, Blue Mallow,

Cheese-cake. Malva comes from the Greek word “malaxos”, meaning slimy, or to soften.

Chemical constituents: Flavonoids, mucilages, terpenoids, phenol derivatives, enzymes: sulphite oxidase, coumarins, vitamins: tocopherols (vitamin E) and ascorbic acid (vitamin C), fatty acids/sterols. Pigments: chlorophyll A, chlorophyll B and xanthophylls (3).

Food and nutrition: The leaves, flowers and roots have a long history of edible use spanning continents over thousands of years. The leaves can be used as a vegetable. They are a great thickening addition for soups. The flowers can be added to salads. Mallow water has been used as a vegan egg substitute. The root can also be blended with water and then strained to make creamy nutritious plant milk(2). Mallow is high in calcium, vitamin A and iron, as well as dietary fibre, magnesium, selenium and vitamin C (4).

Ecological role: Common mallow is commonly found on waste ground, footpaths, meadows, moist ground and roadsides. Mallow’s strong roots can help aerate and fertilise degraded soils. Katrina Blair writes how mallow can be a great ‘midwife’ to other plants, as well as how mallows can be susceptible to several fungal colonies, including mallow rust, which causes dark orange coloured bumps to appear on the underside of leaves. The cause of this fungus is often from an overly moist environment and a dense thicket of mallow (2). Herbalists Julie and Mathew Seal highlight that the low-growing leaves tend to accumulate heavy metals from vehicle exhausts (5).

Cultivation and Harvesting: Mallow is very easy to grow from seed and is adaptable to most soils. Mallow leaves are best harvested when the stems are bright green and healthy looking (beware of rusted leaves). It’s ideal if the plants can be used fresh because of their water and mucilaginous content, however, they can be dried too (they will lose about one-third of their mucilaginous qualities). The roots are best harvested in the autumn when they have more mucilage.

Energetics

Temperature: Neutral to cooling depending on the constitution

Moisture: Moist

Tissue State: Dry/Atrophy, Heat/Excitation, Wind/Tension

Taste: Sweet, salty

Herbal actions: Antibacterial, astringent (mild), anthelmintic, demulcent, diuretic, emollient, expectorant, inflammation modulating, laxative.

Health challenges supported by Common Mallow

J.T. Burgess wrote in 1868 that “The Uses of Mallow are infinite” (2). The fresh or dried leaves are best infused in cold water (to preserve the mucilaginous content), and drunk for the treatment of the digestive, respiratory and urinary tracts. A fresh herb and root tincture can also be made, however, this mucilaginous herbal action will be significantly affected. Some of the health challenges supported by common mallow include:

Digestive issues: Mallows are mildly astringent, which means they help to tone the mucosal membranes and the skin. It also has a vulnerary action with an ability to staunch mild bleeding. Combined with its soothing, emollient and moisturising properties, you can see why it is useful for people who have patterns of heat and inflammation in their digestive tract. This includes ulcers, gastritis, colitis, and enteritis, as well as Crohn’s disease. It can also support people to recover from leaky gut syndrome, commonly caused by prolonged use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatories such as aspirin, antibiotics, the pill, recreational drugs, high sugar and highly processed diets. Mallows, marshmallow, in particular, can also support with heartburn and issues of gastrointestinal reflux. In digestive challenges, the strong herbal infusion is most effective as you want to cover as much surface area as possible. Likewise, for inflamed conditions such as haemorrhoids, mallow can bring relief. Herbalist Sajah Popham recommends sitz baths especially (7).

Respiratory infections: The herb is a powerful demulcent for coughs, colds, sore throats, asthma and chest troubles. Sajah writes that marshmallow (the most commonly used member of the mallow family) “soothes, calms, cools and moisturises a respiratory system that is overly inflamed, hot and tense. It tends to relax excessive spasm in the smooth muscles lining the entire tract

and increase mucous secretions from the membranes. Marshmallow is for respiratory conditions that are hot and dry.”

Sore throats: Mallow can help soothe sore throats, especially those that are hot and dry and in need of moisture and cooling. The flowers are commonly made into a syrup for this purpose.

Urinary tract infections: In a similar way to the above, mallow helps to soothe the inflamed tissues in the mucosal membranes of the urinary tract. The leaves, rather than the roots, are more commonly used for UTI infections and they also have a diuretic effect. Marshmallow is commonly used by herbalists to help relieve conditions such as cystitis, urethritis and nephritis.

Toothache: Mallow flowers can be chewed to relieve toothache.

Insect bites, boils and abscesses, sores, cuts, bruises or general skin complaints: You can chop or chew the fresh leaf and apply directly as a poultice.

Burns: Marshmallow leaves (but any mallow leaf you can access in an emergency) have also been used in traditional burn care (after common first aid practices are followed). Mallow leaves traditionally have been combined with olive oil for the prevention of blistering (8).

Cosmetic skin care: Katrina Blair says that “Mallow is celebrated in our community as one of the best skin repair remedies around. As a face wash and healing mask, it repairs sun damage and rejuvenates the skin. It makes a wonderful green facial mask that removes skin blemishes and irritation amazingly quickly.” (2) Mallow leaf and flower can also be made into herbal oils to soothe and regenerate the skin.

Sore or strained eyes: Mallow can also be made into an infusion for bathing inflamed eyes (9).

Musculoskeletal system: While not famous for its affinity with the musculoskeletal system, many herbalists include mallow in their mixtures

because of its moistening effect on people with joint pain linked to dryness. Also, as a lot of musculoskeletal issues can be linked directly to inflammation in the gut (in the case of my rib cage, food intolerances were a major culprit) mallow can be used to support inflamed tissues.

Immune system: Another less known affinity of mallow is its support for the immune system because of its actions on the mucous membranes. Sajah describes how “The presence of polysaccharides indicates an immunological quality, as commonly these sugar compounds are seen as similar to bacteria or other pathogens by the immune system, thus triggering it into a heightened state of activity. It’s also important to remember that the mucosa is laden with white blood cells and immunity to protect the body from pathogenic invasion. Thus by simple virtue of increasing mucosal secretions immunity is enhanced” (7).

Cautions: In large doses, mallow can be laxative and purgative. While it can take a while to get to grips with the concepts of energetics, it is important to remember that mallow is not ideal to give to people with cold/wet/damp conditions (unless skilfully combined with other warming herbs).

How to practically use Mallow in prison

Where you might find mallow: I used to find mallow in the stony areas in full sun, often at the edges of curbs and walkways within the prison.

Digestive inflammation - for people with stomach ulcers, gastritis, colitis, enteritis, Crohn’s disease, gastrointestinal reflex, heartburn - drink a cold infusion ideally of the roots if you can but the leaves are also great if not. Do this for six weeks and then take a break, continue as needed.

Haemorrhoids - add the leaves to a ‘sitz bath’ (where you are basically placing your ass in the water) - ideally some kind of tub/bowl large enough for you, or if your wing has a bath you can add the leaves to the water. Or to make it stronger, make a cold infusion first in cups/bottles/any container you can get and let it infuse for as long as you can and then add it to the bathwater. If a sitz bath is not an option, you could also mash up some leaves with a bit

of water and place directly. You could also make a small poultice or pad and place in your underwear.

Coughs, colds, asthma and chest troubles - drink the cold infusion.

Sore throats - drink a cold infusion. Eating flowers directly can also help.

Urinary Tract Infections - make a cold infusion and drink as much as possible, at least 2-3 times per day for conditions such as cystitis, urethritis and nephritis.

Toothache - chew a mallow leaf.

Insect bites, boils and abscesses, sores, cuts, bruises or general skin complaints - chew the fresh leaf and apply it directly to the skin, holding it in place for as long as you need until you have pain relief or the swelling subsides.

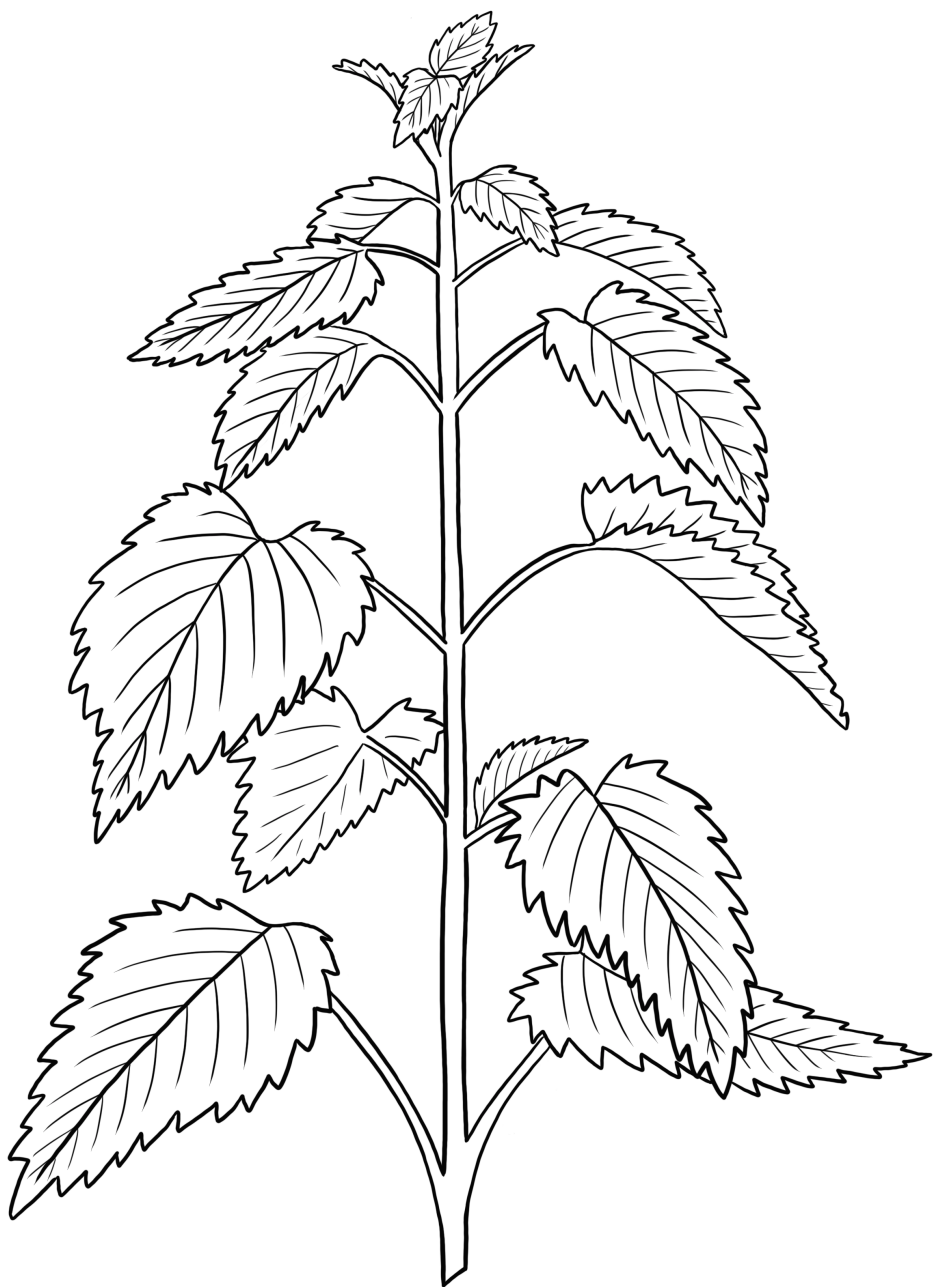
Burns - after doing the necessary first aid (see the wounds section for more detail), mallow leaves can also be placed on the skin for minor burns. You can also make a compress with a cold infusion of mallow and wrap around the affected area.

Face mask - make a strong cold infusion with mallow leaves/flowers. Apply damp leaves to the face and allow to sit there. Then remove and wash your face with the infusion.

Sore eyes - make a cold infusion with the leaves and use as an eyewash. I know it's unlikely you'll have an eye bath available in prison. One option is to save those little plastic cups that they give out during medication. Make sure it is super clean and then pour the infusion into that and wash your eye in it.

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NETTLE: DEVIL'S LEAF

Latin name: *Urtica dioica*

Plant family: Urticaceae (nettle family)

Identification: Broad oval to heart-shaped leaves, square stalked, coarsely toothed leaves 4-8cm long in opposite pairs up the upright stem. You will know nettle because of their famous sting!

Other species: *Urtica urens* (small nettle)

Folk names in English: Stinging nettle, wild spinach, hoky-poky, hidgy-pidgy, devil's leaf. In Latin "uro" means to burn. Dioica is derived from Greek, meaning 'of two houses' (having separate staminate and pistillate plants; dioecious)(1).

Chemical constituents:

- Leaves: Amines (histamine, choline, acetylcholine, serotonin, and 5-hydroxytryptamine; acids including ascorbic; flavonoids including quercetin; glucoquinone; minerals including calcium, potassium, iron, magnesium; silicic acid
- Roots Phenols; plant sterols including stigmasterol and stigmasterol
- Seeds: Fatty acids including palmitic, stearic, oleic, linoleic, eicosanoic (2)
- The sting itself is due to the formic acid and the action of histamine, acetylcholine and serotonin present in the leaf bristles (3).

Food and nutrition: Nettles are incredibly nutritive. They are rich in

vitamins C and A, iron, magnesium, calcium, chromium, zinc, potassium, phosphorous and silicon. The iron in nettle is very easily absorbed and assimilated. The tops are edible. Nettle is also made into beer. Nettle soup, pesto and nettle curry are common recipes. Nettles sting goes away when dried or cooked.

Ecological role: Nettles grow on mostly damp and moist soils, especially where nitrogen or phosphate-rich. Nettles can commonly be an indicator of eutrophication e.g. where there is runoff from fertility, or where grazing animals urinate regularly (4). Nettles also commonly grow with cleavers. Nettles can be found in woods, scrub, brambles, bracken, and patches in fields, as well as on disturbed ground in urban areas. Nettles make an excellent addition to hot composting batches.

Other uses: Gabrielle Hatfield describes how nettles have been used since at least the Bronze Age for making cloth in cord, referencing the saying “Devil used nettles in May to make his shirts” (5) In addition, Nettles have been used as hair tonics.

Energetics

Temperature: Cool

Moisture: Dry

Tissue State: Cold/Depression, Damp/Stagnation, Hot/Excitation

Taste: Salty

Health challenges supported by Nettles

As a spring tonic and diuretic: In their ethnobotanical research of the British Isles, David E. Allen and Gabrielle Hatfield found that two-thirds of records for nettles describe their use as a ‘spring tonic to cleanse the blood of impurities (6)’. While ‘spring tonic’ is a vague term, nettles are valued for their alterative action. Herbalist Sajah Popham describes alterative remedies as those that open up the channels of elimination of the body, facilitate the expulsion of waste products, and adjust or “alter” the metabolic functioning of the body (7).

These alterative actions also mean that nettle can support folks with chronic

skin conditions, arthritic pains, gout and oedema. Many of these are associated with the energetic perspective of ‘damp accumulation’. Nettle helps with the excretion of uric acid. Sajah says nettles also have a ‘solid influence on hypothyroidism’ at least symptomatically. Herbalist Zoe Hawes remarks that Romans used their sting to stimulate circulation in their extremities and ease rheumatic pain when faced with the cold weather in Britain (8). Likewise, it’s common in many cultures to flog oneself or others with nettles due to their stimulating effect on the circulation. This is called urtication.

As a nutritive: Due to its vitamin and mineral rich content, nettles are often recommended for folks recovering from chronic illness or injury or just general weakness. Their relative safety means that many people consume them daily in the form of nourishing infusions. They can also be taken as decoctions and integrated into the diet in diverse ways (see nutrition section above). Nettles can also be infused into vinegar as a great fast way to access their abundance in minerals.

Nettles are an amazing ally for folks with anaemia and blood deficiency. Sajah describes nettle’s power: “not only by providing baseline nutrients to build the blood but also through supporting the liver in the building and recycling of blood. This building of the blood makes it one of our chief remedies for low blood pressure as well, indicated by paleness, weakness, dizziness upon rising, low energy, mental fog and dullness, and overall poor nutrition to the heart” (7).

Supporting the kidneys: Kidney failure can be fatal and any kind of kidney-related issues like kidney disease need serious, ongoing medical attention and care. Herbally, nettles are a kidney trophorestorative. Nettles can also support the adrenal glands which sit on top of the kidneys. They can have a stimulatory effect and so are better used when folks are incredibly burnt out and exhausted, where they can have more of a restorative effect.

Prostate support: Nettle root is a very well-researched remedy for the prostate. Sajah says it has been studied rather extensively in its capacity to reduce swelling of the prostate associated with BHP (Benign Prostate Hyperplasia). Nettles have also been used for impotence.

Seasonal allergies: While not addressing the cause of allergies, nettle can offer relief and if taken longer term, can help significantly reduce or stop seasonal allergies. People can either consume dried extract in capsules quite frequently or folks can drink a lot of a very strong decoction. Due to its drying action, it can definitely help with dripping noses, as well as with redness, itchiness and swelling in the face common to hay fever.

Uterine tonic: For pregnant folks, nettle can provide optimum nutrition. It is also a powerful ally post-childbirth where it can astringe any bleeding. It can also be used to help address spotting between periods for folks who menstruate. Nettle can also stimulate lactation for people who are breastfeeding.

For diarrhoea and the digestive system: Nettle's astringent action can support people with chronically loose stools. When combined with antimicrobial herbs, they can also support people suffering from infectious diarrhoea. Nettle's toning action on tissues has also led to its use for people with leaky gut syndrome. It has even been used for internal bleeding. Nettle can also be used for urinary tract infections and inflammation.

For the lungs: Nettle's powerful astringent action is also useful for the respiratory system. It can help dry out excess mucous in the mucous membranes of the lungs.

Supporting the connective tissues and muscular-skeletal system: Sajah states: "This affinity works widely throughout the body, from the circulatory system, the joints, the uterus, hair, skin and nails, the muscles and even the bones. This is achieved through its nutritive tonic effects as well as the inflammation-modulating activity" (7). Nettles are chlorophyll-rich and this has an alkalisng effect on tissues. Infused vinegar is a great way to support bone health, especially when combined with dandelion and chickweed that are also listed in this herbal.

Burns: In terms of treating burns (following all other conventional burn advice), nettles can also offer support. It is recommended to make a strong decoction or infusion of the leaves and soak a gauze (kind of bandage) in the infusion and then wrap around the burnt area.

Cautions: Nettles are generally considered very safe, however, due to their diuretic action, caution may be needed if someone is taking other forms of diuretics. They can also be quite drying - if you notice this, you may wish to combine nettles with a moistening herb like mallow that is detailed in this book.

How to practically use Nettles in prison

Where you might find nettles: Nettles will be where there is damp or often where there is shade. We used to find them in a patch near the segregation unit which didn't get any sun. However, they will also happily grow in the sun. They are most likely going to be growing in a patch together out of sight where gardeners can't get their hands on them to pull them up.

How to harvest them: As you may know, or may soon learn - they have a nasty sting! It's hard to harvest them in prison unless you work in the gardens and have access to proper gloves. If you have no gloves, you can use the inside of your jumper sleeve or some other kind of fabric. Just make sure it is thick enough. You can also put a plastic bag around the top of the nettle stalk and then cut them, but getting hold of scissors is probably going to be as difficult as anything else! Either way, the adventure of harvesting them will be worth it for the amazing nutrition they have.

The more you develop a relationship with nettles and the more you pick them with your hands, you do get used to the stings and the way they sting you. Alternatively the folk expression "grasping the nettle" - now used to talk about going for something with courage - is a reference to the fact that one way to avoid getting stung is also to take a firm hold/pinch of stem as you break it, this crushes the needles and minimises the sting.

It is important to harvest newer growth before they flower. After flowering, once the leaves are older, there is a concentration of constituents that may be irritating to the kidneys.

Nutrition - to really maximise all those vitamins and minerals in nettles, the best way to consume them is either to eat them directly or to infuse them in water overnight (or for several hours) to make a strong nourishing infusion. Nettles are only safe to eat if you have a way to 'de-sting' them. The best way

is putting them in hot water.

You can also add them directly to things like soups and stews but only really if you can cook them up as part of them. If you just mixed them in with a plate of food you'd be given, you'd probably get stung in the mouth still (which is not fun!). So unless you can access a kitchen, I'd recommend making an infusion. Simply add the nettles to warm water and cover. The longer you let them sit in the water the stronger they will be, so you might want to experiment with the flavour that you like. After however long (a few hours, or overnight at the longest), strain out the nettles and drink the infusion. It has a strong flavour but is such a powerhouse of nutrition! You can also make a nettle-infused vinegar by following the instructions of how to make vinegar in the medicine making section. Vinegar is a great way to extract minerals from plants.

Arthritis, gout or oedema - try to drink nettle tea regularly, or make strong infusions as often as possible. For pain relief in the affected area, you can also sting yourself to get blood flow to the area (this was the traditional way it was used).

Digestive inflammation - for people with stomach ulcers, gastritis, colitis, enteritis, Crohn's disease, gastrointestinal reflex, heartburn - drink a cold infusion of nettle, ideally combined with plants like plantain and mallow listed in this book.

People recovering from chronic illness or weakness - regular nettle infusions and eating nettles as much as possible. It is also necessary to take nutritional supplements where it is not possible to get enough high quality through nutrition, such as in prison. This is especially important for vegetarians and vegans in prison.

Anaemia - regular nettle infusions and eating nettles.

Prostate swelling or impotence - here your biggest ally is the root. On the outside, people are going to be able to access powders of the root and/or nettle root tincture. For people in prison, it will be harder to access this medicine. Options could be to harvest and dry the roots in your cell if possible.

You could then ‘powder’ this up yourself and mix it up into water and drink it 2-3 cups per day.

Seasonal allergies like hay fever - drink a very strong infusion before going outside. If you can continue to drink nettles throughout the winter too then your allergies may be significantly reduced the following year.

Spotting between periods - drink nettle tea or infusions regularly.

Leaky gut syndrome - drink 2-3 cups of nettle tea a day, ideally in combination with other herbs.

Urinary tract infections - drink nettle tea.

Chest infections - drink nettle tea, ideally combined with other anti-infectious herbs.

Burns - after standard first aid for burns (if it’s a minor burn, running under cold water), you can then make a strong infusion of nettle leaves and soak a gauze (in the case of prison - some kind of fabric/cloth you have access to) and wrap around the burnt area. Plants like plantain or mallow are preferable but if nettles are all you have, they will definitely help.

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German Chamomile



Wild Chamomile or Pineappleweed

CHAMOMILE: GROUND APPLE

Latin name: *Chamaemelum nobile* (Roman chamomile), *Matricaria chamomilla* (German Chamomile), *Matricaria discoidea* (Wild chamomile/Pineapple weed)

Plant family: Asteraceae

Identification:

- German chamomile - this is an annual plant that self-seeds. It can grow 10-80cm high. It has white flowers with a yellow disk in the middle surrounded by evenly spaced white florets. It generally flowers in June and July and smells pleasant and sweet.

- Roman chamomile - this is the chamomile which is very low growing at only 6-10cm. It is a perennial. The flowers are smaller than the German chamomile.

- Wild chamomile/Pineapple weed - Low-growing hairless herbs with leaves deeply and intricately cut into very thin lobes, the main lobes divided further into smaller ones (2-pinnate) which themselves can be divided (3-pinnate) (1). It has a strong pineapple smell. The flower heads are 30-45mm across with yellow centres and no white petals.

Other species: Corn chamomile (*Anthemis arvensis*) has no scent. Scentless chamomile or Sea Mayweed (*Tripleurospermum inodorum*) is found at the seaside.

Folk names in English: Maythen, Manzanilla, Whig Plant, Ground Apple. The Latin name is derived from the Greek 'khamaelon' meaning 'earth apple'.

Chemical constituents: German chamomile: terpenoids (α -bisabolol, α -bisabolol oxide A and B, chamazulene) sesquiterpenes; coumarins (umbelliferone); flavonoids (luteolin, apigenin, quercetin); patuletin; spiroethers: en-yn dicycloether and other components such as tannins, anthemic acid, choline, polysaccharides and phytoestrogens.

Roman chamomile: terpenoids: chamazulene, bisabolol; flavonoids: quercetin, apigenin, luteolin; coumarins: scopoletin-7-glucoside and other components like angelic and tiglic acid esters, anthemic acid, fatty acids and choline (2).

Food and nutrition: Chamomile is used as a flavouring agent in alcohol beverages, bitter tonics and teas. It has also been used to flavour desserts and sweets. Herbalist Mark Pedersen writes that tests show chamomile is commonly high in fat, magnesium, phosphorous, riboflavin and sodium and very high in niacin (3).

Ecological role: Chamomile is often found on well-drained soil on waste ground and around field margins. You can find chamomile across Europe and temperate Asia and North Africa, as well as some parts of Australia and Argentina. Chamomile was used as a strewing herb in the Middle Ages to help keep insects away. They were hung in bundles or placed on the floor and in furniture. Chamomile is commonly grown and imported from Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, France, Greece, Hungary and Egypt.

Cultivation: Medicinal herb growers Jeff and Melanie Carpenter say “Chamomile likes full sun and well-drained sandy loam with good fertility and organic matter. This annual will readily self-seed, however, self-seeded beds are often interspersed with weeds that chamomile will not out-compete.” (4)

Energetics

Temperature: Cooling

Moisture: Drying

Tissue State: Wind/Tension, Heat/Excitation

Taste: Aromatic, bitter, sweet

Herbal actions: Analgesic, anti-allergenic, anti-anaemic, anti-

inflammatory, anti-parasitic, antiseptic, antispasmodic, bactericidal, calming, carminative, cholagogue, cicatrisant, digestive, emmenagogue, febrifuge, hepatic, hypnotic, immuno-stimulant, nerve sedative, ophthalmic, stomachic, sudorific, tonic, vermifuge, vulnerary (5).

Health challenges supported by Chamomile

Chamomile has a very long history of traditional use in every region it is found. It was also one of the nine sacred herbs of the Anglo-Saxons.

Nervous system: Chamomile is a mild to moderate nervous sedative. It can help us switch from a sympathetic to the parasympathetic nervous system state. It will help calm the nervous system and relax the muscles. It can also really help with troubled sleep that is attributed to restlessness.

Indigestion: ‘Indigestion’ is a bit of a catch-all phrase for a variety of digestive system complaints including belching, bloating, gas etc. Herbalist Sajah Popham says “Chamomile is unique in the way it contains both bitter compounds as well as aromatic volatile oils, which leads to a nice combination of our two primary digestive actions. Thus we see an increase in gut secretions, local circulation to the digestive organs, and an overall relaxant/antispasmodic effect.” (2)

Herbalist David Hoffman writes “Because Chamomile is rich in essential oil, it acts on the digestive system, promoting proper function, this usually involves soothing the walls of the intestines, easing griping pains, and facilitating the elimination of gas. A cup of hot chamomile tea is a simple, effective way to relieve indigestion, it calms inflammations, such as gastritis and helps prevent ulcers.” (6) Chamomile can also help with stomach aches, nausea, heartburn, loss of appetite, diarrhoea and constipation.

Ulcers: Ulcers are sadly all too common in our stressed-out world. These include stomach ulcers (peptic ulcers), small intestine ulcers (duodenal ulcers) and in the oesophagus. They are often caused by the prolonged use of NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen), as well as food allergens irritating the gut. Sajah says chamomile helps via its vulnerary and inflammation modulating properties as well as gently helping to support

digestion.

Joint pain, tendonitis, repetitive strain injury (RSI) and skin conditions: These can be helped by applying diluted chamomile essential oil topically. Chamomile has a stunning blue essential oil that is high in chamazulene and azulene. It can be diluted and used topically for conditions like rosacea, eczema, and psoriasis to bring symptomatic relief. It can also be used for rheumatoid arthritis, rheumatic pain and fibromyalgia. When I was unwell with costochondritis (inflammation in the cartilage of the ribs), I would use chamomile essential oil with coconut oil and rub it all over my ribs as I was going to bed. It helped me fall asleep when I was in a lot of pain and also reduced the inflammation. Joint pain, tendonitis, RSI and skin inflammation can also be relieved by adding a chamomile infusion into your bathtub or making and using a compress on the sore area.

Gum problems: A mouth rinse of chamomile tea can help with gingivitis as well as other gum inflammations and sores in the mouth.

Fungal infections: Chamomile can help internal and topical fungal infections. Topical applications, including poultices and baths, can help with skin rashes and inflammation, including those from a fungus. I once had an acute fungal infection in my toenail while on a speaking tour that affected my ability to walk. The people where I was staying didn't have many herbs but they did have chamomile tea bags, so I made a very strong infusion with lots of bags and gave myself an impromptu foot bath. I also wrapped the nail with the garlic and oil and thankfully it healed up quite fast. My friends were surprised that my embarrassing limp went overnight!

Pink eye: Sajah writes how chamomile can be useful for pink eye and conjunctivitis, "Chamomile is very helpful by either applying a tea bag topically on the eye (only used once - meaning one tea bag for each eye), or making a tea with a bag or loose tea (straining it really well) can be used as an eyewash for conjunctivitis. The tea can be applied by dipping a cotton ball into tepid cooled tea and applied by wiping from the inner eye to the outer eye in one sweep. When this is done, make sure to discard the cotton ball after each eye and be sure to wash hands in between" (2).



Dandelion Flower (*Taraxacum officinale*)



Dandelion Leaves



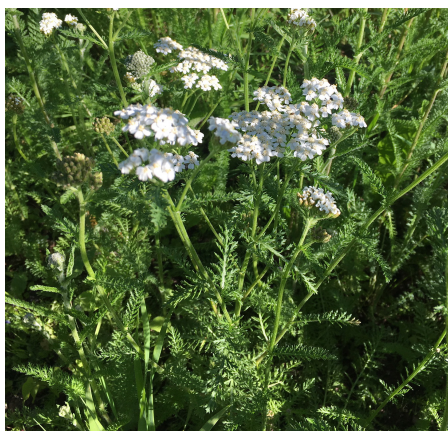
Greater Plantain (*Plantago major*)



Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*)



Yarrow Flower (*Achillea millefolium*)



Yarrow Full Plant



Chickweed (*Stellaria media*)



Tiny Chickweed Flower



Common Mallow (*Malva sylvestris*)



Common Mallow Full Plant



Musk Mallow (*Malva moschata*)



Musk Mallow Full Plant



Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)



Stinging Nettle coming into Flower



German Chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*)



German Chamomile Flowers



Wild Chamomile/Pineappleweed
(*Matricaria discoidea*)



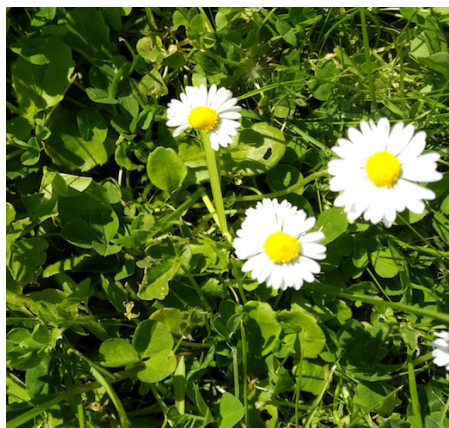
Wild Chamomile Full Plant



Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*)



Selfheal Full Plant



Daisy in Cut Lawn (*Bellis perennis*)



Daisy in Gravel



Rose (*Rosa spp.*)



Prickly Wild Rose (*Rosa acicularis*)

Pre-menstrual tension: Chamomile can be a really great ally for people who menstruate who would like some relief from nervousness, tension, irritability and all the other feelings that can be experienced in that time before coming on! It can help calm folks down but can also support by dispersing stagnation and draining fluids which will help ease menstrual pain. It can also act as an emmenagogue to help bring on bleeding. Chamomile can help calm menstrual cramps by its pain killing, anti-inflammatory and antispasmodic actions.

Upper respiratory tract infections and allergies: Conditions such as bronchitis, catarrh, asthma and spasmodic coughing can all be helped by chamomile. These conditions are best helped with steam inhaled through the nose and mouth. Sajah says, “The mucous membranes of the mouth, sinus, throat and lungs all benefit from the oils within Chamomile, fighting off invading pathogens and helping to sooth the tissue and heal the mucosa, and reducing inflammation” (2). It can help calm down allergic reactions and it has been used as an old treatment for hay fever.

Haemorrhoids: Chamomile can be added to a sitz bath to help cool down itchy irritated haemorrhoids.

Childrens complaints: Chamomile is super safe for children which makes it a very well used remedy. For fevers, it can be combined with peppermint and lemon balm. It’s also good for colic and diarrhoea. Overall it can also just help an irritable child chill out due to its action on the nervous system. For teething, a traditional remedy is soaking a cloth in the tea or infusion, letting it cool and then applying it to the sore area. A cloth can also be soaked and then put in the freezer to become a freezable chew that the baby can chew on for relief. Chamomile has also been made into all sorts of gels for teething kids, as well as creams and ointments for nappy rash. Be aware that children will need less than adults.

Hair care: For folks with blonde or golden hair, chamomile been used as a hair wash to keep hair light.

Seasonal allergies: Chamomile can also be extremely useful for hay fever sufferers, especially if mixed with nettle and plantain that are detailed in this book.

Cautions: Do not take during pregnancy. Be careful using in therapeutic doses in combination with orthodox anticoagulants. Sajah says “Caution with CNS depressants, such as opiates, alcohol, benzodiazepines tricyclic antidepressants, anaesthetics, or anti-epileptics. Avoid with Warfarin and related anticoagulant medications. Avoid if allergic or sensitive to aster-family plants” (2).

How to practically use Chamomile in prison

Where you might find Chamomile: German chamomile does grow in the wild but it is increasingly hard to find and I would be very surprised to find it in prison unless it was somehow introduced into a prison garden intentionally. When I was inside, Roman chamomile was planted in one of the gardens and German chamomile was planted in the new mother and baby unit garden, which is where I harvested them from. However, wild chamomile (pineapple weed) is often the most abundant which is why I included it in this profile. You can find it growing on gravel and in paths however, this tenacious weed often comes up in the most unexpected places.

Stress - drink the tea whenever you feel tense and stressed. It is particularly good if you are trying to ‘wind down’ after a particularly hard day. I used to drink it after emotional visits.

Insomnia and poor sleep - try drinking the tea before you go to bed (better to have a stronger smaller cup then to be up half the night needing the loo!). Leave for at least 30mins for a strong brew.

Indigestion - drink a cup of chamomile tea.

Joint pain and inflammation - now sadly, you’re not going to be able to access the concentrated essential oil in prison. However, drinking the tea will still help. If you only have access to the canteen-bought tea bags then you can

still place the warm tea bags on sore joints for relief. You can also soak fabric in the strong tea and wrap around sore areas. If you have access to the plants, then simply make a strong infusion and do the same.

Gum inflammation and mouth sores - make a cup of chamomile tea and then swish it in your mouth and rinse.

Skin rashes and inflammation - make a super strong infusion and add it to a warm bath if possible. If you do not have access to a bath then you can soak some material in the infusion and wrap it around the affected area.

Toenail infection - either do a foot bath in a strong infusion of chamomile or if this is not possible you can also place a warm teabag directly on the affected toe.

Conjunctivitis (pink eye) - place a warm (not hot!) teabag over each eye and leave on for at least ten minutes. Make sure to throw away the teabags afterwards to not spread infection. You can also make an eyewash with some chamomile tea that has cooled down. If you have access to cotton wool then dipping it in cool tea wiping your eye from the inside to the outer eye can also help.

Pre menstrual tension and period pains - drink chamomile tea.

Upper respiratory infections such as a sore throat or blocked sinuses - make a strong infusion of chamomile ideally in a bowl and place your face over it with a towel over your head so that you can inhale the steam.

Allergies - Drink the tea and use a strong tea as an eye bath for hay fever, or other allergic inflammation.

Haemorrhoids - add chamomile to a sitz bath.

References

1. Plants and Habitats, Ben Averis
2. Chamomile monograph, Materia Medica Monthly produced by the Sajah Popham at the School of Evolutionary Herbalism
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5. Chamomile monograph, The Plant Medicine School
6. The Holistic Herbal, David Hoffman



SELFHEAL: PICKPOCKET

Latin name: *Prunella vulgaris*

Plant family: Lamiaceae (mint family)

Identification: Selfheal has short, upright, square-sectioned stems bearing stalked small, oval, sparsely hairy leaves and short blunt flower spikes. The leaves are untoothed and not glossy, and the flowers are purple (1). They have a spreading mat-like habit and are semi-green perennials.

Other species: Can be mistaken for Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*) - but worth remembering that bugle has blue flowers not purple and a bit of a different growing habit (like taller spikes rather than spreading like Selfheal).

Folk names in English: Selfheal, heart's ease, pickpocket, poverty pink, heart o' the earth, heal-all, woundwort, blue curls, sicklewort, Carpenter's Herb touch and heal. Ceannbhan beg is the Irish Gaelic name. Vulgaris means common in Latin. 'Brunella' in German means quinsy, which is one of the uses Selfheal is indicated for.

Chemical constituents: Flavonoids including rutin, vitamins A, B, C, K, fatty acids, volatile oil, bitter principle, pentacyclic triterpenes based on ursolic, betulinic and oleanolic acids, tannins, caffeic acid, rosmarinic acid (2).

Food and nutrition: Selfheal is edible. The raw leaves and flowers can be added to salads. They are quite bitter in flavour so they've often been made to taste nicer through cooking. They were traditionally used as a potherb and

added to soups and stews.

Ecological role: Selfheal can be found on dry to moist, neutral to basic soils in unimproved short grasslands, in rush mires, woodland glades and along roadsides, tracks and paths (1). It's also common in lawns. I have also found selfheal growing in the lawn where I live amongst daisies, as well as on bare soil in the polytunnel. They are very attractive to bees and other beneficial insects. Selfheal is very tolerant of poor soils and was often considered an indicator of them.

Cultivation: You can grow selfheal from seed or by dividing larger plants. It can tolerate full sun and partial shade.

Energetics

Temperature: Cooling

Moisture: Drying

Tissue State: Heat/Excitation, Wind/Tension

Taste: Bitter, pungent

Herbal actions: Antibacterial, antioxidant, anti-tumor, astringent, diuretic, liver stimulant, reduces blood pressure, vulnerary (2).

Health challenges supported by Selfheal

Selfheal has a broad heritage of traditional use, especially in Ireland and England. It is also used in traditional Chinese medicine, though harvested at a different time in its life cycle.

Wounds: Selfheal can help staunch bleeding and aid with wound healing. Recent research has shown it to be antibacterial and that it may play a role in alternatives to conventional antibiotics that bacteria are increasingly adapted to. As recently as the second world war there are records of charcoal burners in Kent using selfheal for cuts and bruises (3). It can also help reduce the swelling of bites and stings (4).

Mouth and throat problems: Due to its astringent nature and ability to heal wounds, it is highly effective for treating mouth and throat problems. Selfheal has been used as a mouthwash and gargles for a sore throat, gum inflammation and mouth ulcers.

Flu, fevers and viral infections: Selfheal can help with hot fevers and warm flu conditions with its cooling, immune stimulating and antiviral qualities. Research has shown it to be an excellent antiviral effective against Herpes and the Human Papilloma Virus (4).

Diarrhoea: Selfheal has been taken internally as a tea to help with recovery from diarrhoea.

Lymphatic system: Herbalist Ally Hurcikova writes how Selfheal has an affinity for the lymphatic system and can be taken for swollen glands, mumps, glandular fever, mastitis, nodules, cancer or other lingering infections (4).

Allergies: Due to its action on the lymph, selfheal has been indicated to help seasonal allergies. It contains immunomodulating polysaccharides which support the immune system helping the body to respond to allergies rather than suppress them (5).

Thyroid issues: Ally notes that Selfheal has a normalising action on the thyroid, stimulating an underactive thyroid and reducing an overactive one (4).

Support for cancer treatment: One study on people with breast cancer showed that Selfheal prevented side effects, namely, neutrophil-reduced fever and anemia caused by chemotherapy. This study indicates different interesting advantages of using Selfheal during cancer treatment, such as improving overall survival rate (6).

Urinary tract infections: Selfheal has been shown to be effective for urinary tract infections, including E.coli infections (7).

Cautions: It is not recommended to consume Selfheal if you are taking blood thinning medication.

How to practically use Selfheal in prison

Where you might find Selfheal: I found selfheal in the lawns amongst the grass and daisies, it was especially abundant if there had been bare patches of soil. You may also find it growing under other plants.

Wounds - you can apply selfheal leaves directly to a small cut to help stop the bleeding. For more advanced preparations, see the wound care section.

Hot fevers, viruses and flu-like conditions - drink 2-3 cups of selfheal tea throughout the day.

Seasonal allergies - drink a strong cup of selfheal tea first thing in the morning, ideally combined with nettles.

Sore throat - gargle selfheal tea and then spit.

Gum inflammation and mouth ulcers - make a strong cup of selfheal tea and swish in the mouth before spitting out.

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1. Plants and Habitats, Ben Averis
2. Selfheal Monograph, The Plant Medicine School
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7. Antimicrobial activity of *Prunella Vulgaris* extracts against multi-drug resistant *Escherichia Coli* from patients of urinary tract infection. Komal S, et al. Pak J Med Sci. 2018 May-Jun.



DAISY: BRUISEWORT

Latin name: *Bellis perennis*

Plant family: Asteraceae (daisy family)

Identification: Low rosettes of small, short-stalked, oval, shortly-hairy leaves with shallowly toothed edges. White and yellow flower heads (1.5-2.5cm across) on short leafless stems (1).

Other species: Similar to Oxeye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*). It also has similar properties to Arnica (*Arnica montana*) but is more abundant and available locally, with fewer toxicity risks. There are ten species in the *Bellis* genus.

Folk names in English: Day's eye, brainwort, brusewort, bruisewort, banwort, common daisy, lawn daisy, poor man's arnica. *Bellum* in Latin means war and may also be from Daisy's use in wound healing.

Chemical constituents: Saponins, essential oil, resin, mucilage, bitters, vitamin C (2).

Food and nutrition: Daisy is edible but not to everyone's taste and definitely not in large quantities! Some people use daisy as a garnish or in soups where other ingredients can counteract their taste.

Ecological role: Daisy is found mainly on moist, neutral to basic soils, in unimproved or improved grasslands kept short by grazing, mowing or trampling. Also in disturbed habitats such as roadsides and waste ground.

(1). The flowers can be harvested from April to October, however, with our changing climate I have noticed daisies even earlier. You can also make a mental note of where you saw the flowers so that you can still harvest the leaves in the winter.

Cultivation: Not necessary!

Energetics

Temperature: Cooling

Moisture: Drying

Tissue State: Heat/Excitation

Taste: Bitter, sour

Herbal actions: Anti-inflammatory, astringent, cicatriscant, expectorant, vulnerary (2).

Health challenges supported by Daisy

Most people know daisy from making daisy chains of the flowers as kids, or from its use in divination “he loves me, he loves me not” picking off the petals one by one. However, daisy is an underestimated medicinal plant with a long history of use. Contemporary research has documented the antimicrobial activity of daisy’s essential oils, as well as anti-tumour activity in the digestive tract (5).

Bruises: Daisy can be applied topically for bruises using either fresh poultices of the herb or through salves and ointments made from the infused oil. To make a fresh poultice you just need to pulverise slightly and then apply to the skin. There are also records of daisy being used to treat burns in England and Ireland (5). People may be familiar with Arnica for treating bruises and strains. Daisy is used similarly, however, it has the extra benefit of being safe on broken skin whereas Arnica is not.

Wounds, sprains and strains: According to research by herbalists Julie and Mathew Seal, back in Roman times, army surgeons organised the

collection of daisies by slaves to extract the juice. Bandages soaked in this juice treated sword and spear wounds (4).

Acne rosacea: Herbalist Zoe Hawes writes how daisy can be applied for dilated blood vessels in the red noses and cheeks of acne rosacea (3). This is best via a fresh infusion of the flower heads.

Varicose eczema: Zoe Hawes writes how daisies can be used in a wash for weeping skin problems such as varicose eczema, particularly in combination with yarrow (3). Daisies can also be added to a hot bath to soothe skin complaints.

Haemorrhoids: Daisy is known for relieving irritation from haemorrhoids and is often combined with horse chestnut when treating the condition (3). Daisy flowerheads can be made into an infusion and used as a compress or used as an enema.

Gout, arthritis and joint disease: Daisy has been taken internally for skin and joint disease including conditions such as gout and arthritis. This is generally with a fresh herb tincture (but see the cautions below) (3). It is likely it is daisy's diuretic action that is at play. Daisy is often combined with elderflower for gout and arthritis.

Coughs and colds: Julie and Mathew Seal write that “daisy is a traditional expectorant which taken as an infusion relaxes spasms presenting as coughs and catarrh or colic.” In the amazing book on the medicinal ethnobotany of the British Isles, records show daisy being used as an infusion for coughs and colds in Wiltshire (5).

Eyes: Daisies have been noted for uses in eye lotions in Ireland and for ‘eye troubles’ in Scotland.

Cautions: Do not use internally during pregnancy if you have digestive bleeding or irritation. Internally, it is best to use daisy with some supervision and support from an experienced herbalist.

How to practically use Daisy in prison

Where you might find Daisy: I found daisies in the lawn of the small triangle of grass we had in the prison courtyard. I have also found daisies growing in gravelled areas and in cracks in paths, however, look at any mowed grass first where they are most likely to be.

Bruises - you can make a fresh poultice by gently pulverising the fresh flowers and then placing them directly on the bruised area.

Sprains and strains - gather up as many flowers as possible. If you have access to any kind of blender in a prison kitchen that would be absolutely ideal. If not, you can also just go for it and try to mash them up as much as possible with cutlery. Add some water in to help with the mashing. You then need to soak some fabric in this juice and apply to the affected area. If you don't have large quantities of daisy, you could also make a very strong infusion and soak the material in that and apply.

Acne rosacea - make an infusion with the flower heads and then apply to your face with cotton wool or use as a wash.

Varicose eczema - if you have access to a bath, add fresh daisies to the bath.

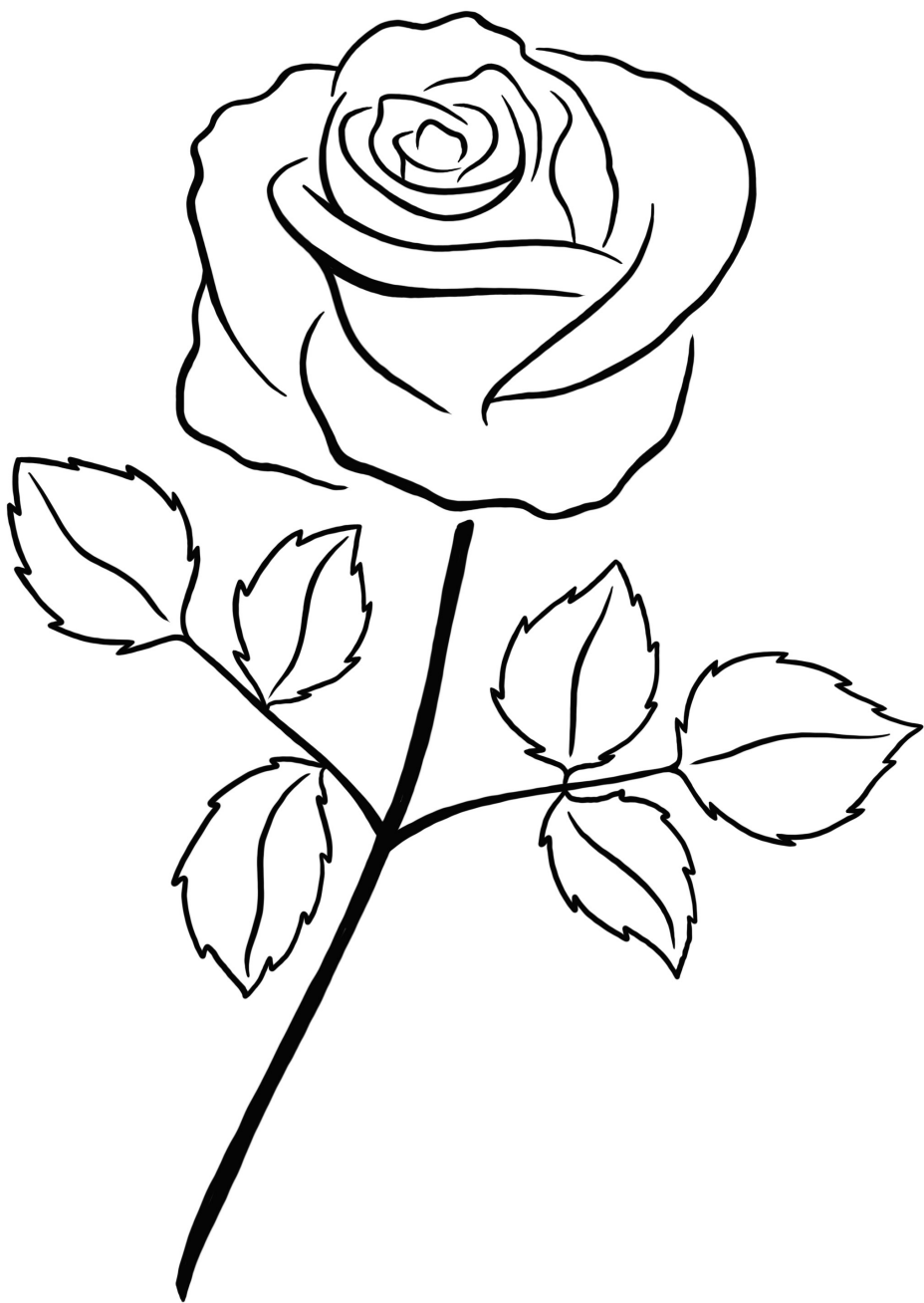
Haemorrhoids - add the flowers to a sitz bath. You can also soak some material in the infusion and then apply directly to the area.

Coughs and colds - make an infusion with the flowers and drink.

Eye inflammation - make a tea with daisies and let it cool and then use as an eyewash.

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1. Plants and Habitats, Ben Averis
2. Daisy monograph, The Plant Medicine School
3. Wild Drugs, Zoe Hawes
4. Wayside Medicine, Julie Bruton-Seal and Mathew Seal
5. Medicinal Plants in Folk Tradition. David E. Allen and Gabrielle Hatfield



ROSE: WITCH'S BRIAR

Latin name: *Rosa species*

Plant family: Rosaceae (rose family)

Identification: Roses have a climbing habit and prickly stems as in bramble but the stems are rounded in section, so they look smoother (apart from the prickles!). Their leaves are not evergreen and are divided into 5-7 leaflets which, apart from the end one, are in two rows along the leaf stalk. Large stipules (leaf-like structures) are attached to each side of the lower part of the leaf stalk. For wild roses, they have large white or pink flowers in the summer, becoming red 'hips' in the autumn (1).

Other species: There are 13 species of wild rose in Britain and many hundreds of different kinds of domestic cultivars. Wild roses include Field Rose (*R. Arvensis*), Sweetbriar or Eglantine (*R. Rubiginosa*), Downy rose (*R. tomentosa*). Commonly used medicinal roses include Apothecaries rose (*R. gallica*), Damask rose (*R. damascena*) and Provence rose (*R. centifolia*). Europe's native rose is Dog Rose (*R. Canina*).

Folk names in English: Rose, Queen of Flowers, Rosa, Shatapatri, Witch's briar.

Chemical constituents: Tannins, pectin, carotene, fruit acids, flavonoids, fatty oil, nicotinamide, vitamins A, B, C, E, K, + folic acid, calcium, potassium, sodium, sulphur, iron, saponins, rutin, quercetin (6).

Food and nutrition: Rose petals and rose hips have many well-known uses, most famously in the perfumery and cosmetic fields. However, rosehips have long been made into various conserves. In her ‘Herbal Kitchen’ book, Kami McBride shares that she makes rose hips into drinks, smoothies, vinegar, cordial, oils, ghee, bath and foot soaks. She uses the rose petals for facial masks, steams, body wraps, therapeutic baths and foot soaks (3).

Ecological role: Wild roses can be found on dry to moist soils, especially in lowland woods and hedgerows (1).

Cultivation: Roses generally like partial shade to full sun with frequent watering. There are many resources (and opinions) about how to grow roses.

Energetics

Temperature: Cooling

Moisture: Moist (petals), Dry (hips)

Tissue State: Hot/Excitation, Damp/Relaxation, Cold/Depression

Taste: Bitter, sweet, astringent

Herbal actions:

- Rose petals: alterative, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, aperient, astringent, nervine, nutritive, tonic (3)

- Rose hips: antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antispasmodic, aperient, astringent, carminative, nutritive, tonic (3)

Health challenges supported by Rose

Nutrition and immunity: Research from way back in the 1930s showed that rose hips had 24 times more vitamin C than oranges, plus good supplies of vitamins A, B and K (4). Gabrielle Hatfield writes how rosehips substituted oranges during the second world war through impressive self-organisation, “The collection was organised at a county level by schools, voluntary groups and branches of the Women’s Institute. By the end of the war, 2000 tons of rosehip had been collected for syrup manufacture” (8). The syrup helps to fight infection in the digestive tract. The petals also have good anti-viral properties and combine well with St John’s wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), Elder (*Sambucus*

nigra) and Self-heal (*Prunella vulgaris*) for treating viral infections.

Sore throats and toothache: Kami recommends gargling rose petal tea for a sore throat (3). Rose water/rose tea also makes a good mouthwash for mouth ulcers and bleeding gums.

Eye troubles: Rose petals boiled together with chickweed was a traditional medicine recorded by Gabrielle Hatfield. Rosewater or cool rose tea is also a soft, safe eyewash.

Nervous system support: Julie and Mathew write that rose buttresses the nervous system, relieves insomnia, soothes nerves, and evens out heart palpitations and arrhythmias (4). I know from experience how cooling rose water can be for people in states of hyperarousal or post-traumatic stress. Elisabeth Brooke, the author of the fantastic book *Traditional Western Herbal Medicine*, writes how “Rose is an excellent heart remedy following shock, trauma, heartbreak and all kinds of depression and anxiety. It cools agitation and restlessness, gives hope and space and helps to drown out dark negative feelings such as suspicion, cynicism, bitterness and anger. Rose brings a feeling of love, wellbeing, peace and happiness” (2). Rose can create a sense of safety inside, even if the outside is not safe. It can help increase inner strength to cope and help us relearn to receive love when barriers have been put up. It is also a powerful support for those experiencing loss and grief.

Skin inflammation and general skin care: Rose can also help cool skin inflammation and take the heat out of boils, acne, spots and rashes. Rose vinegar is also commonly used after prolonged sun exposure. Rose is incredibly popular for skin care and is used in all variety of lotions, toners, face sprays, cleansers and more.

Cuts: Rose leaves have been used to treat cuts due to their astringent and anti-bacterial action.

Vaginal challenges, uterine pain, excessive menstruation, cramps and menopause: Julie and Mathew Seal write how rose is a cooling tonic, reducing uterine pain and the cramp of heavy periods and supplements the

treatment of infertility and low libido especially during menopause where it is particularly cooling and balancing. Rose is also used in vaginal steaming and can be a safe effective douche too. Alexis.J. Cunningsfolk describes how “Excessive menstruation is eased by a strong tea of dried Rose. Also useful for uterine spasms and cramping. A vaginal douche can relieve infection, inflammation, and conditions such as vaginitis and thrush. Checks diarrhoea and internal haemorrhage. Add to postpartum sitz baths for healing.” (6)

Digestive issues: Rose can be used to reduce the spasms involved in diarrhoea, colitis and dysentery (4). Alexis also highlights that Rose has probiotic qualities and in addition to supporting healthy gut flora it assists in clearing toxins from the gut. It assists with promoting healthy metabolism and helping return the body to its ideal weight. Use Rose during and after the use of antibiotics to rebuild gut flora (6). A rose petal bath can have a cooling effect on haemorrhoids.

Cautions: The short hairs in rose hips are dangerous internally and have been added to infamous itching powders used in pranks for generations. It's always best to process rose hips, for example, by boiling and using in syrups. Caution is also advised during pregnancy.

How to practically use Roses in prison

Where you might find roses: So I know many prisoners will see Rose listed in the contents and be like WTF, there are no roses in prison gardens! However, I included it because, in HMP Bronzefield where I was, the main courtyard was full of them. I think in newer prisons, especially private prisons, they are planted up with flowers like roses to somehow sanitise the suffering and violence inflicted by the prison on people's lives. For the many visitors and government officials walking around the gardens, plants like roses give the impression that it is a better place than it is, if you know what I mean. If you are lucky enough to have roses growing somewhere then they are likely to be in full sun or at the very least partial shade. They will be planted in beds and not growing in the concrete like plants like dandelions.

Sore throat - make a strong tea with the rose petals and gargle.

Mouth ulcers and bleeding gums - make a strong tea with the rose petals and gargle.

Viral infections - drink rose petal tea. If you can access rose hips to process and make into tea, even better.

Eye inflammation - make a strong tea with rose petals, combine with chickweed if you can, but no problem if you can't. Once it is cool, try to wash your eye with it. In the 'how to prepare plant medicines in prison' section I have included information on how to make an eye bath.

Insomnia - drink rose petal tea.

Stress, despair and grief - drink rose petal tea.

Skin inflammations such as boils, acne, spots and rashes - add rose petals to your bath if possible. You can also make a strong infusion with rose petals and soak fabric in the infusion then apply to the area.

DIY skin toner/cleanser - wash your face with cool rose petal tea.

Small cuts - place a rose petal directly on the cut. You will be amazed at how quickly it can stop bleeding.

Hot flushes due to menopause - drink rose petal tea.

Menstrual cramps - drink rose petal tea.

Vaginitis and thrush - add rose petals to a bath if possible.

Diarrhoea - take sips of rose petal tea during recovery.

Haemorrhoids - add rose petals to the bath, or make a sitz bath with a strong rose petal infusion.

References:

1. Plants and habitats, Ben Averis
2. Traditional Western Herbal Medicine: As Above So Below, Elisabeth Brooke
3. Herbal Kitchen: 50 Easy-to-Find Herbs and Over 250 Recipes to Bring Lasting Health to You and Your Family, Kami McBride
4. Hedgerow Medicine, Julie Bruton-Seal and Mathew Seal
5. Prepper's Natural Medicine: Life-Saving Herbs, Essential Oils and Natural Remedies for When There is No Doctor, Cat Ellis
6. Rose Plant Profile, The Tarot Apothecary Course with Alexis J. Cunningsfolk
7. Edible Wild Plants and Herbs: A Compendium of Recipes and Remedies, Pamela Michael
8. Medicinal Plants in Folk Tradition. An ethnobotany of Britain and Ireland, David E. Allen and Gabrielle Hatfield

SECTION 2: CANTEEN REMEDIES

SPICES AND CONDIMENTS

The majority of this information has come from the fantastic book, Kitchen Medicine by Julie Bruton-Seal and Matthew Seal, as well as The Herbal Kitchen by Kami McBride. Unlike the medicinal plants listed in this book, I have not tried all of the below. However, these are all very trusted herbalists with good reputations so I hope this information is useful.

Chilli powder (Cayenne)

Chill is good for people with poor circulation. It can help move blood to the extremities so making it useful for people with Raynaud's and atherosclerosis. Chilli is also full of vitamin C. It's known to kill some stomach nematodes (worms). Chilli can help people coming down with a cold, flu or the chills in general. It's also useful for coughs. You can add a teaspoon to warm water and drink or add the powder to your food. If you have no access to cayenne pepper, hot chilli sauce can play a similar role in terms of warming you up and getting the blood moving. If you cut yourself (superficially), after you have rinsed the cut in clean water you can then cover it with cayenne pepper. It stings a little but then the bleeding stops and you have effectively disinfected the wound. Always be careful to not touch your eyes after handling cayenne pepper!

You can also get the benefits of cayenne through hot pepper sauce. However, it is really not for everyone - if you already have quite a warm or hot constitution, it could heat you up too much or give you heartburn or digestive troubles. Listen to your body!

Cinnamon Powder

Cinnamon increases warmth and circulation in the body, which can often relieve pain in arthritic joints and the lower back. Cinnamon tea can help with menstrual cramps and uterine spasms. It is an age-old remedy to use if you're coming down with a cough, sore throat or cold. It will help move congestion in your chest. It can also be used as an aid to digestion, helping with nausea, flatulence and recovery from diarrhoea. Cinnamon also can be mixed with water to make a mouthwash for inflamed gums. There are claims that cinnamon contains properties that are beneficial for blood sugar regulation and treatment of type 2 diabetes. Several small studies have linked cinnamon to better blood sugar levels, and suggest it may curb blood sugar by lowering insulin resistance.

Coriander Powder

Coriander is antispasmodic - it can help with cramp and spasms in the gut and can also relieve tension headaches. You can add coriander powder to cornmeal or flour with some water and thicken it into a paste that can be applied to rheumatic joints to help ease the pain. Warning - some people react to the oils so stop it if you develop a rash or red blotches. It can also help with anxiety and nervous tension. Overall, coriander is 'cooling' and good in conditions where there is inflammation with heat.

Cumin Powder

Cumin is a carminative helping to support digestion by relieving bloating, gas and griping pains. It can also help move dampness in the chest making it useful for chest infections and coughs. Cumin is an anthelmintic which means that it can help expel parasitic worms. It can also help with nausea and for people who are breastfeeding, it encourages lactation.

Garlic Powder

Garlic contains some very powerful antimicrobial compounds meaning it can help fight off bacteria, parasites and viruses. If you are getting sick, eat garlic! Not everyone can handle eating fresh or raw garlic so sprinkle on your food if it makes it easier to take when you are feeling unwell. If you really don't like the taste it is possible to get the benefits by rubbing a halved clove on the bottom of your feet where it will enter your bloodstream. Herbalists

Julie and Mathew Seal write that garlic was used in both the First and Second World Wars to treat battle wounds, preventing sepsis and gangrene. Garlic can also be used for toothache, but be careful because garlic is very ‘hot’ and can actually burn the skin. It is always best mixed in something, like oil. Garlic cloves can also help with bloating, stomach cramps and constipation.

In addition, garlic is also well-known support for the cardiovascular system and can help lower cholesterol. Herbalist Kami McBride says, “Garlic has been clinically studied as a heart medicine for more than thirty years, and its usefulness in supporting people with hypertension and diabetes is well documented. Garlic prevents blood clots and protects arteries from age-related stiffening. It lowers high blood pressure and reduces the risk of stroke.”

A garlic poultice can also be made to hold against the ear during ear infections, or against the chest during a chest infection. You can also place it on external wounds. To make a garlic poultice crush up fresh garlic (or use powdered garlic from the canteen). If it’s fresh then crush it up until there are juices. Place it on a cloth and then fold it over to cover it. Then place the poultice in some warm water for a few seconds. Squeeze out the water and then press the poultice on the affected area. Take it off immediately if it irritates the skin in any way. Hold it there for a few minutes and then rewarm it to keep applying it.

Garam Masala

Garam masala is a mixture of different spices commonly used in Indian and South Asian cooking. The word garam means “hot” and masala means “spice blend.” I was blown away to see it on the prison canteen list and I imagine its supplied for people who are able to cook on their wings or units. This amazing mix of spices can support immunity, helping with digestive processes, alleviate pain and lower blood sugar levels. The ingredients vary region to region but the common base mixture often includes black pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cumin and nutmeg, some of which are explored individually in this section. The blend will obviously taste the nicest when added to curries or to flavour rice dishes, however, if you were coming down with a cold you could also add a teaspoon of the spice mix to warm water and drink.

Ginger

Ginger root is absolutely incredible. In prison, it’s likely you can only

access the powder but it is still worth using. Herbalist Kami McBride says “Ginger helps with colds, flu and coughs. It relieves nausea, motion sickness, seasickness, and sore throats. Ginger increases circulation, gets rid of mucus congestion, settles an upset stomach, dispels gas, relieves aches and pains, reduces inflammation and menstrual cramps, supports the pancreas, and stimulates digestion.”

You can sprinkle the powder on food, such as your porridge. You can also just add a teaspoon to some hot water and drink. If you want to seriously sweat out a cold or fever, you can add four tablespoons of ginger powder into a sock or tied up in a cloth, and add it to your bath. Run it under the hot water tap to help you extract it. The bath will massively heat you up (you can even drink tea in the bath at the same time). You can also make a ginger poultice for boils by mixing the ginger powder with some flour or cornmeal and some water to make a thick paste. Apply the paste to a boil and cover with some cloth to keep in place.

Hot Curry Powder

Supermarket bought curry powder similar to that the prison service supplies commonly contains ground coriander, cayenne pepper, cumin, salt, yellow mustard seed, allspice, ginger, black pepper, garlic powder, paprika, turmeric, bay leaves, ground cinnamon and cloves. You can read about the spices individually on this page. It can be used in similar ways to garam masala - if you are unable to add it into meals, a teaspoon in warm water will have a strong effect in warming you up and fighting an infection.

Mixed seasoning

A typical mixed seasoning can contain basil, marjoram, oregano, rosemary, sage and thyme. All of these herbs could have long profiles about them and their amazing properties. Adding them to meals will improve their nutritional quality. Many have antimicrobial properties which are why they were commonly added to foods, beyond giving meals more flavour. I wasn't able to access mixed herbs as a seasoning in prison but if I could have I would have definitely added them to meals and consumed them when I was getting sick, by adding a few teaspoons to hot water and drinking the tea.

Mustard

Herbalist Kami McBride writes “One of the strongest rubefacients in the world, mustard is a powerfully warming, penetrating and moving herb. A strong circulatory stimulant, mustard brings blood to the surface of the skin, which enhances nutrient delivery to and waste removal from the body. If you are someone who moves around with chronically cold hands and feet, think about using a little mustard in your food, as it increases circulation throughout the body. Mustard used regularly can help reduce arthritic pain. For such a tiny seed, it is surprisingly vigorous in its ability to relieve pain, congestion and stagnation.” Make sure to eat more mustard or have it in some water if you have a damp, cold cough you can’t get rid of. You can also add mustard to a foot bath. Another traditional use was chest poultices. Make sure mustard never touches the skin directly. You can wrap it up in cloth and apply on your chest to help with coughs and conditions like bronchitis.

Oats

I know they are not a spice or a condiment, but I could not publish this book without highlight the amazing and diverse uses of oats. Oats are truly restorative to the nervous system. They are rich in fibre and high-quality protein, as well as many vitamins and minerals. On the outside, oat straw (milky oats) is what is mostly used medicinally to help people recover from burnout, trauma and chronic stress. In such a high-stress environment like a prison, oats are definitely something you want to be eating.

You can also apply oatmeal to your skin - it can absorb and remove oil and bacteria and exfoliate dead skin cells. Apply it on as a paste with some water and leave on for 10-15 minutes before washing it off. You can also wrap it in some material and add it to a bath to help soothe skin inflammation or even just to help wind down and recover from stress. Oats are also helpful topically for dry, itchy eczema.

Paprika powder

Paprika is one of the most popular spices. It combines chilli peppers, bell peppers and other dried peppers. It increases heat in the body and helps digestion and metabolism. The paprika powder can be sprinkled on wounds in the same way detailed in the paragraph about cayenne pepper. It is very antibacterial and if you have a tooth or gum infection you can swill your mouth with paprika mixed with water. It can help ease arthritis and joint pain.

Ointments and creams are often made for these conditions.

Pepper (Black)

I remember a lovely woman I was in prison with called Helen who used to drink pepper tea and swear by it. It always reminds me of her now! The good thing about black pepper is that it is generally available on the wing. Black pepper helps digestion by stimulating the digestive juices which makes it easier to eat. You can add it to warm water to help heat you up to fight colds and infections. It is especially good for clearing damp ‘mucousy’ coughs.

Salt

Herbalists Julie and Mathew Seal say that “Natural sea salt comprises 95% sodium chloride and 4% potassium chloride. It also contains more than fifty other minerals and trace elements. Interestingly, it has roughly the same balance of minerals as found in human blood.” Unfortunately, a lot of highly processed prison food is completely loaded with salt and can have the opposite health effect, contributing to high blood pressure. You can dissolve salt in water and use it to wash cuts, abrasions and minor wounds. A salt solution can also be used as an eyewash, mouth wash and gargle. For a gargle or wash, use two teaspoons of salt, whereas for an eye bath only just half a teaspoon.

Salt is a good gargle for sore throats and tonsillitis. Every hour, add a teaspoon to hot water, gargle and spit it out.

Tandoori masala

Tandoori masala is a spice blend that combines cumin, coriander, cloves, cinnamon, ginger, garlic, chilli, turmeric, mace, and salt. It generally contains more chilli (and therefore more heat) than garam masala however you can use it in similar ways medicinally if it is all you have access to.

Thyme

Thyme is such an amazing medicinal herb. If you are able to access thyme from the canteen, then it will help you out a lot with all kinds of complaints. The tea is an effective remedy for sore throats due to its powerful antibacterial nature. Its antispasmodic action can help with hacking coughs and acute bronchitis, as well as digestive complaints like cramps or bloating. In Germany, herbal medicine is highly researched and regulated. They have

approved thyme oil in the treatment of bronchitis, whooping cough and upper respiratory inflammation. Thyme can also help wounds and is antiseptic. Research has also shown a positive effect on mood. One of the compounds, carvacrol, increases levels of dopamine and serotonin. Adding dried herbs to prison food will definitely help with digestion and if you come down with any kind of sore throat or cough, make sure to drink thyme tea.

Turmeric powder

Turmeric has been used in traditional Chinese and Indian medicine for thousands of years. It has some well-researched anti-inflammatory and antioxidant compounds making it useful for all kinds of diseases and conditions. It can really help people with pain and swelling from arthritis. A common way turmeric is taken is by adding it to milk (often with other spices at the same time, such as cinnamon and cumin). You can also add turmeric to yoghurt as a DIY face mask. Turmeric can help with swellings and skin inflammation by applying it to the area as a poultice. Combine turmeric and some black pepper with some kind of oil or flour and water. Cover with a cloth as a makeshift bandage. You can leave this on for as long as a couple of hours. It will have a yellow stain that is temporary, so don't use it right before a visit! Of course, we can't forget the spice is amazing in cooking added not just to curries or rice but also soups and stews or whatever you can get your hands on in prison.

Vinegar

Vinegar can be sprayed in the shoes if you are suffering from a fungal foot infection, as well as be added to the bath to help with fungal skin diseases or vaginitis. It can also be put on wasp stings and sunburn (via a compress). You can also add a bit of vinegar to warm water for a hair rinse that helps with dandruff too.

TEA AND COFFEE

Tea

Black Tea like most of the spices listed in this book has its origins in the British empire's legacy of colonial violence and exploitation. Combined with sugar, this trade propelled the trans-Atlantic slave trade. What most people don't realise is that they are having the benefits of plant medicine every time they make a cup of tea. Now it's a cure-all for everything, from upsetting news to social gatherings, people's go-to is "let's have a cup of tea". Herbalists Julie and Mathew Seal write that a cup of tea contains about half the caffeine intake of coffee, which makes it a mild stimulant with a lift that improves short term mental alertness. They write how, "the astringency in tea readily settles upset stomachs and diarrhoea, the antioxidants attacking infection and improving intestinal tone. This is both a western and a traditional Chinese remedy. For best results use black tea (more tannins) without sugar or milk. A Chinese treatment for gastroenteritis is a mixture of used green tea leaves and dried ginger."

A used tea bag can also be placed over inflamed eyes. You can also use tea bags or material soaked in warm black tea and place it on inflamed joints, insect bites and skin irritation.

Peppermint tea

Peppermint tea will help if you have a headache and it can also help to increase mental clarity. Face steams will really help clear sinus infections and sore throats. It acts as a decongestant. Peppermint is also a fantastic ally for the

digestive system. Drinking the tea can help stomach aches, pains and cramps, heartburn, gas/flatulence, indigestion and diarrhoea. It can also help ease period pains. Avoid peppermint tea if you are pregnant or if you are suffering from acute gallstones or a hiatal hernia.

To help with muscle pain or skin inflammation you can add peppermint tea bags to your bath (about 5 or so). You can also add used peppermint tea bags to your bin to help cover the smell, apparently mice don't like the smell of peppermint either so you can wipe the tea around your cell to deter them if they are an issue.

Chamomile Tea

See the chamomile profile.

Coffee

Everyone knows that coffee is a stimulant. For people with quite energetic personalities, it might be too much stimulation and lead to restlessness, heart palpitations, anxiety and insomnia. However, if this is isn't your constitution, coffee is actually packed with antioxidants and research is showing that it can be protective for the gastrointestinal problems, liver cancer, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. Cosmetically, coffee grounds can be used as a face scrub. Coffee can also have a laxative effect but is best not relied on (more fibre, water and an abdomen massage can bring relief). Bitter flavours like coffee also stimulate the liver to produce bile, which is an important part of optimal digestion.

Earl Grey Tea

Earl grey has many of the same health effects as black tea listed above. Earl grey is commonly flavoured with bergamot which is calming and uplifting. Compared to coffee, earl grey tea is a gentler support than coffee for stress and emotional struggle.

Red Berries Tea

I cannot say with accuracy what ingredients the mixed 'red berries tea' contains that is listed on the prison canteen list. Large brands, like red berries tea sold in supermarkets, often contain some herb leaves like blackberry leaf or hibiscus. They also contain added flavourings such as raspberry, strawberry and cranberry. It is hard, therefore, to describe accurate medicinal

uses. Generally, red berries tend to be high in vitamin C making them useful for colds and infections. Their antioxidant content also helps to mitigate inflammation and disease. Raspberry leaf, in particular, is commonly given to pregnant folks in moderation to strengthen their uterine walls before childbirth. It is also great for people with period pains or general pre-menstrual tension.

Green Tea (including Lemon Green Tea)

Green tea is made from unfermented tea leaves. It is high in antioxidants which is why it's been used traditionally to help prevent disease. It does contain caffeine which can help increase energy levels, concentration and mood. Green tea bags can also be placed over the eyes to help reduce bags and dark circles under the eyes. You can also use a strong tea as a hair rinse, as well as using the remainders of the herb in the bags as a face scrub.

Hot Chocolate

Cocoa is full of antioxidants. Unfortunately, a lot of them can be lost via industrial processing methods. And hot chocolate is often loaded with sugar which can outweigh the benefits. You can make hot chocolate even more nourishing by adding the powder to hot rose tea. This is the perfect drink for someone recovering from an upsetting day, like losing a loved one or getting sentenced in court.

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Apples

Apples are wonderfully nutritious and packed with antioxidants, vitamins and minerals. Cooked apple can be combined with chamomile to help shorten diarrhoea. Fresh apple can also help with constipation. They are also very useful for people with high blood pressure or other heart-related conditions. Apple peel water has been used as a wash for inflamed eyes, the pulp has been placed over the eyes as a poultice too. Be careful with apples in prison though as they are very unlikely to be organic, make sure you wash them well.

Bananas

Bananas can be eaten to help settle the stomach. As a source of potassium, bananas are useful for people with osteoporosis. They can also help lower blood pressure, stress and hypoglycaemia. Their iron content also helps stimulate the production of haemoglobin in the blood making them useful for people with anaemia. You can also use the inside of a banana skin on bruises, for treating sunburn and for mosquito bites.

Beetroot

Beetroots are high in vitamins and minerals. Studies have shown they can lower blood pressure. They are a great fibre source and can feed the good bacteria in our guts. They have a good amount of iron so are a useful food source for people who are anaemic. The beta-carotene present in beetroot also aids in reducing or slowing macular degeneration in the eyes.

Blueberries

Blueberries are full of antioxidants which make them especially good for eye health, as well as helping the digestive system. Julie and Mathew Seal write that “Blueberries have a popular reputation for improving night vision and eye health in general. Scientific research has confirmed and explained this opinion. By their antioxidant action, these fruits help ‘scavenger’ free radicals from breaking down vitamin C and the nutrients in the small blood vessels in the eye. This effectively delays the onset of cataract and glaucoma and macular degeneration”.

Carrots

Carrots contain beta-carotene, a precursor for carotene and vitamin A, which makes them useful for the kidneys, lungs, eyes and skin. Beta-carotene is an antioxidant which has been shown by research to locate and destroy carcinogens in the lungs and pancreas. Carrots are a good food to eat (especially mashed up) for people recovering from diarrhoea. Carrot oil can be used for chapped and dry skin, sunburn and sun damage, eczema and itchy skin. Making carrot oil in prison would only be possible if you had access to a kitchen (unlikely for most). To make it grate two carrots and then add the equal volume of oil - ideally olive oil or coconut oil if possible. Warm gently until the carrots are soft and the oil has turned orange. Strain and then bottle the oil. Try to keep somewhere cool if possible.

Cabbage

Cabbage is a very good source of dietary fibre, calcium, magnesium, and potassium, as well as other vitamins. They were used by sailors to prevent scurvy due to their vitamin C content. Cabbage leaves can be applied to sore breasts of people who are breastfeeding. Studies have shown them to be equal to gel packs in providing relief. The journal *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention*, published research suggesting that cabbage and other brassica vegetables contain a relatively high content of glucosinolates, which have anti-carcinogenic properties. This means that cabbage and other similar vegetables scavenge free radicals, which can be detrimental to overall health and are major contributors to cancer and heart diseases. Cabbage can also help with constipation.

You can also soothe joint pain with a poultice of cabbage leaves. You need to bruise the leaves in some way - like with a big rolling pin or meat hammer (in

prison you could put the leaves on a plate, cover with a clean cloth and get your elbow in there or just try to squeeze out the juice with your fists). On the outside, you'd warm up the leaves gently in an oven, but in prison, you could cover with boiling water just to warm them up. Then you simply layer the warm leaves over the joint and try to hold in place, ideally with some cling film or a bandage but in prison you could use a cloth or a bandana. Leave the leaves on the joint for at least one hour. You can also leave them on overnight. Unwrap and hopefully, you will be in less pain.

You can also wrap cabbage leaves around an infected toenail. Secure with whatever you can and then cover with a sock overnight. In the morning take off the sock and the leaves.

Cucumber

So I hate to say it, but I really despise cucumbers. However, they have some useful medicinal properties for people who like them! Maybe you've seen people put cucumbers over their eyes in movies, well guess what, they work in refreshing the eyes! Simply place a slice over your eyes and relax. Slices of cucumber can also be applied to sunburnt skin (or hot inflamed skin in general). You can also add sliced cucumber in your bath for a cooling effect on irritated skin.

Dates

Dates are a fantastic energy source. They can help people suffering from constipation. You can eat them raw or soak them overnight to help soften them up. They can also help people recovering from diarrhoea. They are also a really good source of iron and other nutrients such as potassium, which studies have shown to lower blood pressure and reduce the risk of stroke as well as other heart-related diseases.

Garlic

See spices and condiments section.

Grapefruit

Grapefruit is a fantastic ally for the immune system due to its high vitamin and mineral content. Research has shown it to be an effective intervention for people with insulin resistance. In one study, subjects who ate half of a fresh grapefruit before meals experienced a significant reduction in both insulin levels

and insulin resistance, compared to the group that didn't eat grapefruit. It also helps people control their blood sugar levels and can reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes. Unfortunately, grapefruit can inhibit an enzyme the body uses to metabolise certain medications such as immunosuppressants, benzodiazepines, calcium channel blockers, carbamazepine, indinavir and some statins - so worth checking with a doctor if you're on any of these (harder said than done in prison I know).

Grapes

Like many fruits, grapes have a good range of nutrients that can help our health, as well as fibre to help with healthy digestion. Grapes are high in potassium making them useful for people with high blood pressure. They are also good if you are constipated. Grapes also contain the antioxidants lutein and zeaxanthin, which can help maintain eye health. Dried grapes such as sultanas and raisins also have these benefits but need to be consumed in moderation due to their sugar content.

Kiwi Fruit

Kiwifruit provides fibre, potassium, folate, phosphorus, copper, and vitamins A, C, E, and K. It's a good source of fibre and can have a bit of a laxative effect. The root and the fruit have been used in traditional Chinese medicine for thousands of years where the fruit was used as a juice to quench thirst, aid digestion, clear heat, and reduce irritability, inflammation, and vomiting.

Lemon

Add slices of lemon to hot water or squeeze the lemon juice in the hot water, and drink for coughs, colds, sore throats and chest infections. Lemon is full of vitamin C and also helps stimulate bile production so you can also use it for nausea or to help with digesting food. The vitamin C and other plant compounds also help it reduce risk levels for stroke and heart disease. Research published in the *Journal of Urology* showed that just a half a cup (4 ounces or 125 ml) of lemon juice per day may provide enough citric acid to help prevent kidney stone formation in people who have already had them. Adding lemon to food may also help with nutrient absorption. Sliced lemon can also be applied directly to spots and blackheads, rub it over the spot and then leave for 10 minutes before washing off.

Lettuce

When I got out of prison, I learnt there was a whole world of lettuces that actually tasted of something, that all grew in different ways and shapes and were very different to the iceberg lettuce served up in prison. Lettuce is a good source of vitamin A amongst other nutrients. Wild lettuce is still used medicinally as a strong sedative to help people sleep as well as providing pain relief. I don't know how much common lettuce you'd actually need to eat to have this effect but it could be worth experimenting - remember Peter Rabbit eating a patch of lettuces and then dozing off? Unfortunately, most food in prison that is dripping with fat puts you to sleep after eating (while simultaneously starving you of all the nutrients you actually need to get a good nights sleep!).

Mango

Mangos are my absolute favourite fruit. Like most things on this page, they were not available to me in a private prison. I think I would have been ten times happier if I could have sunk my teeth into this amazing fruit. Research has shown some of its antioxidant compounds have been found to protect against colon, breast, leukaemia and prostate cancers. The fibre, pectin and vitamin C can also all lower cholesterol. Vitamin A that it contains also helps eye health. Mixing some mango with water can help fight heat stroke. You can also put mango on your skin directly as a DIY face mask.

Mushrooms

There is an incredible world of medicinal mushrooms. However, sadly, in prison you're most likely to only be able to have a couple served up to you with dinner. Even so, they still share many of the benefits of their cousins that have been used in traditional medicine for thousands of years. They are a great source of protein and contain many nutrients including B vitamins, selenium, potassium and copper. They are prebiotic, which means they nourish the good bacteria in your gut. Research has shown certain varieties to be strongly immune supporting as well as displaying anticancer activity.

Olives

Olives have been eaten and pressed into oil for hundreds of years. They are a brilliant source of healthy fats and a great source of vitamin E and several antioxidants including antioxidants, including oleuropein, hydroxytyrosol,

tyrosol, oleanolic acid, and quercetin. Olives help regulate cholesterol and reduce blood pressure making them protective for heart disease. Some olive oil in warm water can help with constipation. Combine with some lemon and ginger and you can help hangovers, general sluggishness and tiredness.

Onion

Onions have amazing medicinal uses beyond being used worldwide in cooking. Onion is antiseptic. Onion poultices draw out poisons, heat, stings and splinters. They can also be used on the chest to break up congestion of colds and flu and have been used in the treatment of asthma. There are anecdotal reports of Russian soldiers using onions for battle wounds in the second world war. Historically, onion was also used to treat the plague and cholera. They have been used on fresh burns offering pain relief. Herbalists Julie and Mathew Seal also add: “Onion was popularly used to treat water retention (oedema), it eased problems of urine retention and added to perspiration. It also increased blood circulation and boosted the iron content of the blood in cases of anaemia. Research has shown that onion lowers blood cholesterol and blood sugars, giving it a role in easing blood pressure and preventing blood clots. It is also a dietary support in type-2 diabetes.”

To make a simple onion poultice, cut an onion and apply the wet side to a bite or swelling and cover with a cloth. Check regularly to see if the inflammation is going down.

Oranges and Satsumas

Oranges are well known for having lots of vitamin C and therefore being good to eat for our immune systems. However, the peel (without the pith) can also be eaten fresh or made into a tea to help calm an upset stomach, reducing flatulence, nausea and morning sickness. It can also help fight colds and tonsillitis.

Pears

Like a lot of fruit, pears are a great source of diverse nutrients that our bodies need to prevent disease. Pears are a good source of fibre which supports the digestive system to function well and to ‘keep things moving’.

Peppers (Bell peppers/Capsicum peppers)

Peppers are high in very high in vitamin C, as well as vitamins B6, K1, B9,

A, E and potassium. They are also rich in various antioxidants that can help prevent chronic disease. See the section on cayenne pepper in the spices and condiments section for more about this amazing plant family.

Pineapple

Pineapple contains vitamins A and C, many minerals and nutritious fibre, as well as the digestive and anti-inflammatory enzyme bromelain. Unfortunately, heat denatures bromelain so tinned pineapples won't have it (but fresh ones will). Pineapple is great to eat for weak digestion, indigestion and bloating after eating. It is good for people to eat who are anaemic or recovering from illnesses who need good nutrition. Fresh pineapple juice can be gargled for a sore throat. Fresh pineapple juice can also be applied to the skin for bruises, tendon pain, tendonitis and bursitis. There is also a folk remedy for corns where a strip of pineapple peel can be attached the corn (obviously the sticky side), hold it in place with some kind of tape. Leave it on overnight. In the morning soak the foot in hot water and remove any spare skin. Keep doing this until the corn is gone.

Potatoes

My friends laugh at me for how much I love potatoes. They even made me a potato and onion dish as an alternative birthday cake and surrounded it with baked potatoes! But honestly, they are an impressive vegetable - containing lots of vitamin C, potassium and other minerals. This isn't a free pass to eat all the chips that the prison serves you up but it is worth highlighting this humble vegetable. Most of their nutritional value comes from the skin.

Raw potatoes have also been used for remedies at home. Slices of raw potato have been placed on warts and burns. Mashed potato has even been used as a face mask! Potatoes can also be warmed up and used as a warm compress on sore joints. They have also been juiced to help with a variety of complaints including skin conditions like eczema and dandruff, inflammation, and dryness on the scalp.

Prunes

Prunes are a well-known remedy for constipation (combined with drinking adequate amounts of water - otherwise they can have the opposite effect). They are also a good source of potassium, vitamins and iron. They have also been

shown to lower blood pressure. Sadly, the sugars in them can make people bloat and their source of natural fibre can worsen diarrhoea.

Sweet Potatoes

Sweet potatoes are a superb source of vitamin A, as well as fibre and potassium. Vitamin A is a very important vitamin in general and a deficiency can lead to vision damage. They can help with constipation. Recent research suggests they may reduce episodes of low blood sugar and insulin resistance in people with diabetes.

SECTION 3: CONNECTING WITH PLANT ALLIES

INTRODUCTION TO PLANT ALLIES

Making herbal remedies in prison was very empowering but what stood out the most from my experience was more the deep relationship I built with certain plants on an emotional and spiritual level. In this section, I want to introduce the idea of ‘plant allies’ and the diverse ways you can connect with plants even in a prison courtyard.

CONNECTING WITH A PLANT ALLY IS AN INTENTIONAL WAY OF GETTING TO KNOW A PLANT, AS WELL AS BEING OPEN TO BEING SUPPORTED BY IT IN DIFFERENT WAYS.

Choosing your plant or letting it choose you

Generally, but not always, people choose their plant allies and connect deeply with one plant at a time. However, it's sometimes more than one. When I was in prison there were definitely different periods where I felt deeply connected to a certain plant and other times where it felt like there was a whole crew of them that I loved. There are different ways to find a plant to partner with. It might be that you just keep seeing a particular plant, maybe even the same one in the same place for many months. Or it might be that everywhere you go you find yourself coming across dandelions or plantain plants. Maybe you keep seeing certain plants in books or on TV, or you find references to a plant in a bible or even in a tarot card. Either way, it is great to work with a plant that you feel drawn towards.

Alternatively, you might have a desire to find a particular plant and you search for it. Maybe you've read a description of it in a book and you're like "that's the one for me" and then you keep your eyes peeled to try to find it. Or maybe you hear that yarrow is associated with warriors in battle and you decide that you want to connect with that particular energy. Or perhaps your heart is heavy with grief and you want to be close to roses right now because they help you to feel better.

Maybe there is a plant that your ancestors used. I know for lots of women I was inside with who were from the Caribbean, that certain meals in prison reminded them of home; in the same way it might be possible to feel connection and comfort from a particular spice from a home region. Perhaps you have nice memories of making a daisy chain when you were a kid. It could even be that a plant has been mentioned in popular cultures, like in films about witches and magic. The options are endless. There is no right or wrong way, simply choose the plant and make an intention to get to know it on a deeper level.

Hanging out with your plant ally

The main point I'd like to make is that you really do not have to do anything. Yes it is great to harvest, taste and research your plant but you can also do, well, nothing. You can just sit and watch your plant. Or look at it from your window, or walk past it while you are walking around the courtyard. No one even needs to know what you are looking at or thinking. You'd be surprised at what happens simply when you hang out with a plant on a regular basis. Maybe you end up dreaming about it, or when you are sat there you get a revelation about something you'd really like to do or something you were undecided about. Maybe you feel a rush of strength. Anything could happen. Generally, it's not a big dramatic moment. Plants don't move around in exciting fast ways like birds or animals, but if you can tap into that quieter side and really listen, you'll be amazed at what you can begin to hear. For some folks, this can even become a kind of meditation.

These subtle emotional qualities can play a big role in bringing something to your life when you are inside. Whenever I felt powerless or somehow humiliated in the prison environment (like from an officer shouting at me etc), whenever I saw dandelions they just ignited this sense of defiance in me. Or I remember seeing them when I was being taken from court to the prison in the sweatbox (prison van) and we pulled up to a junction and I could see this whole patch of

dandelion leaves and once again, I just felt stronger. Plants can also remind us of certain people. Maybe smelling roses makes you think of your Grandmother. My ex-girlfriend Anna who was killed, often used the name 'Daisy' to protect her anonymity in anarchist projects. Now every time I see daisies, my heart just goes to her.

Sometimes we might also not get a good feeling around a plant. There might be this sense of 'bad energy' every time we see it, or maybe when we go near it we get stung or cut by thorns. Listen to this too, maybe it is not the right time to connect with this plant. Or maybe there is wisdom in that message too. Honestly, I cannot emphasise enough there is no 'right way' - just take a dive and see what happens.

Engaging your senses

We learn about plants not only in books but also via our own senses of sight, smell, taste and touch. While there are some poisonous plants, if you have properly identified your plant and researched its safety, then you can for sure start experimenting. This might include making and tasting teas or nibbling a bit of leaf or root. You might like to smell the plant at different times of day or season. You can even keep a journal of how it tastes, or how your body feels after sipping the tea. You might try to notice how does it make your tongue feel? Do you feel warmer or colder? Did you start to produce more saliva or get more thirsty? If you've been stung by nettles, you might think how does it feel? Drawing plants is a great way to engage your sense of sight. Even if you've seen the same plant a hundred times, looking at it more closely, or from a different angle, can show a whole new world. You might like to draw your plant where it is growing. Obviously, this is not always possible. When I was in a downstairs cell, I remember my window looked out onto this neglected patch of land and I could see all these amazing plants growing. I would sit and look out between the bars drawing them the best I could. It helped me pay attention to the different flower and leaf shapes and I could see how plants like daisy closed up when the sun went down.

You might also pick a piece of your plant and bring it inside and spend some time drawing it in your cell. Or if you are unable to do that, maybe you can copy a picture from a book.

Researching your plant ally

It could be that you've chosen one of the plants listed in this book for your plant ally, in which case you have a good starting point for information. However, there is always so much to learn about every plant. Perhaps books from the prison library contain more. Do all that you can to research your plant. You might like to learn its Latin name and the different folk names for it around the world. You could learn about its habitat and how it has migrated. You might like to read about its traditional uses or its chemical constituents. You might really enjoy learning about the folklore of the plant, or the magical or astrological symbolism associated with it. Maybe you like to hear ancient myths or legends involving the plant. Whatever you can, keep reading and making notes to learn more.

Get creative

Write a poem or song about your plant. Paint it. Making a pressing and put it in a frame made of matchsticks. When I was inside I saw just absolute endless creativity from folks and no doubt people will create amazing things from their relationships with plants.

Get to know plants and personalities

In some herbal books, you will read a description of the sort of person the herb is perfect for. Maybe there is someone super highly-strung and tense who needs mellowing out with mallow. Maybe a heartbroken and grief struck loner who needs to move out but just can't open up their heart again finds rose is exactly what they need. It can be fun to experiment with getting to know plants and figuring out the kinds of personalities and situations they seem to fit best with. This might be a lot easier when you know more about the plant itself.

You can also get to know the personalities of the plants themselves. A fun exercise is to imagine if that plant were a human who would it be like. For example, with yarrow, I always imagine this rugged soldier placing yarrow on his bleeding arm as he looks across the battlefield at the wounded. Or dandelion as this tough fucker that no one can kill who is just like, "yeah what?!" Alexis J. Cunningfolk who put together the '30 day plant ally project' asks folks to think

about who in your life is most like your plant? Maybe rose is like a fierce ex-girlfriend who was soppy and romantic but also had these piercing defensive thorns. Maybe plantain reminds you of someone on your wing who seems to get walked all over by everyone. Making up plant personalities can be super silly and fun letting your imagination run wild and it is actually a really good way to get to know plants or to remember their properties. Alexis also suggests making up your own names for plants!

Do some magical shit!

Nervous about going to court? Put some dried root in your bra. Want to feel stronger when you wake up in the morning? Put a picture or drawing of your plant ally on your cell wall. Worried about your prison visit? Say a prayer to your plant ally asking them to have your back. Don't feel beautiful? Create a drawing of a rose and write I am beautiful on the back and look at it each morning. Feel like you need some added protection during your adjudication? Put some yarrow in your shoe. I keep saying the options are endless, but honestly, they are. These suggestions might sound daft but people have been making charms and carrying plants since time began. The ancient dead around the world are all found buried with plants. People have worn jewellery for millennia. People have adorned themselves with certain plant fragrances to help seduce lovers for thousands of years. We can work with plants in all these ways. We can bring their magic into our everyday lives and connect with them to help us survive our sentences and experience joy and connection.

Whatever you do, I hope you find strength in connecting with a plant or several of them!

OUTLAW

Below is a poem I wrote while I was in prison, inspired by my Dandelion plant ally.

Outlaw

Just for a moment
I lose myself
And all that I am is the plant in my hand
My heart engaged
In a language older than words
I ask your permission
Take in your bitter healing
I am no longer VM9385
Tasting the wild, I am alive

Just for a moment
No prisoner, no criminal
But a wise woman
Who talks with plants
Like ancestors who heard their
Whispers thousands of generations before
Alive in the wilderness, a wild outlaw

SECTION 4:

RESOURCES

GLOSSARY

Active Constituent: A chemical molecule that can alter some biochemical process in the body. Most plants or herbs contain dozens, sometimes hundreds, of active chemicals that work together to alter functioning processes of the body, usually in a subtle way.

Alterative: Herbs that feed and nourish the body to promote systemic harmony, that strengthen health by nourishing the body and promoting both assimilation and detoxification by improving metabolism.

Analgesic: Relieves pain.

Annual: A plant that goes through a complete life cycle in one year, dying at the end.

Anodyne: Lessens or relieves pain.

Antibiotic: Destroys or inhibits the growth of bacteria.

Anticoagulant A medication or

natural compound that slows or prevents the formation of blood clots.

Antiemetic: Counteracts or relieves nausea or vomiting.

Antifungal: An agent that kills or inhibits fungi.

Antimicrobial: Aids the body in destroying or resisting pathogens. A general term encompassing antibiotics, antifungals, and antivirals.

Antioxidant: A substance that inhibits oxidation and subsequent damage of important chemicals, enzymes, membranes, cells, and tissues in the body.

Antiparasitic: A herb that helps eliminate parasites.

Antispasmodic: Reduces muscle spasm and tension.

Antitussive: A herb that reduces the urge to cough.

Antiviral: An agent that experimentally inhibits the proliferation and viability of infectious viruses.

Aperient: A gentle stimulant to the digestion and a mild laxative.

Aromatic: A herb high in volatile oils, often with a fragrant aroma.

Arthritis: Inflammation of one or more joints, usually with pain, swelling and/or stiffness and sometimes with changes in the structure.

Assimilation: The process of absorbing or incorporating substances into the body, usually nutrients or active constituents from plants.

Arteriosclerosis: The thickening, hardening, and loss of elasticity of the walls of arteries.

Atherosclerosis: The gradual build-up of plaque on artery and blood vessel walls that leads to blockage.

Astringent: An agent that constricts and binds a cell surface by coagulation of proteins. Herbs that are drying, drawing, and constricting to help create a barrier for healing.

Biennial: A plant that grows for two years before dying.

Bile: A bitter secretion of the liver, concentrated in the gallbladder that

aids digestion, chiefly by saponifying fats.

Bioflavonoids: A class of botanical secondary metabolites shown to have a wide range of biological and pharmacological activities in humans and animals.

Bitter: An agent that increases tone and activity of gastric mucosa, improves the appetite, and stimulates gastric juices.

Bitter Tonic: A herb or blend of herbs that has a bitter taste and is used to stimulate and improve the digestive system.

Bronchitis: Inflammation of the mucous membranes on the bronchi, usually caused by an infection, sometimes by allergies or chemical irritations.

Carminative: These herbs are often aromatic and help expel gas from the digestive system. This action can help ease bloating and gas related cramping.

Catarrh: An inflammation of any mucous membrane, often resulting in swelling or thick mucus.

Cholagogue: A herb which promotes secretion of bile flow from the gall bladder.

Choleretic: A herb that increases the production of bile from the liver.

Conjunctivitis: Inflammation

of the conjunctiva, either from environmental irritation, allergies, viral or bacterial infections.

Compress: A cloth soaked in herbal tea and applied to wounds, rashes, sore muscles, or sprains.

Diaphoretic: Promotes perspiration via dilation of vessels in the skin.

Demulcent: A mucilaginous herb that soothes irritated or inflamed tissue or mucous membranes.

Digestive: A herb that strengthens or supports good digestive function.

Emollient: A herb applied externally to soften and soothe skin.

Emmenagogue: A plant that stimulates menstruation.

Enzymes: Any of various organic proteins secreted by the body that act as catalysts in inducing chemical changes in other substances, particularly in digestion. Enzymes are the communication particles of the body. They carry and sometimes are the nutrients travelling from one gland or organ to another. They not only allow intercommunications but also facilitate absorption.

Enteritis: Inflammation of the small intestines.

Essential Oil: An extremely light and volatile concentrated oil extracted from aromatic plants.

These oils are used in aromatherapy and produced by distillation or chemical or solvent extraction.

Expectorant: A substance that stimulates the outflow of mucus from the lungs and bronchial mucosa.

Febrifuge: A herb that reduces fever.

Galactagogue: A herb that increases the flow of breast milk.

Haemagogue: An agent that promotes the flow of blood.

Haemostatic: Controls the flow or stops the flow of blood.

Hepatic: A herb that affects, heals, supports or repairs the liver.

Herbaceous: A type of plant with little or no woody tissue, usually living a single season.

Immunity: The ability to resist infection and to heal. The process may involve acquired immunity, (the ability to learn and remember a specific infectious agent), or innate immunity (the genetically programmed system of responses that attack, digest, remove, and initiate inflammation and tissue healing).

Materia Medica: A body of collected knowledge and description of remedies suggested in herbal therapy.

Microbe: A minute living

organism, for example, pathogenic bacteria.

Nervine: A herb that affects the nervous system: may be stimulating, sedating, or relaxing.

Parasympathetic: A division of the autonomic (involuntary) nervous system that controls normal digestive, reproductive, cardiopulmonary, and vascular functions and stimulates most secretions. This subsystem works as a direct antagonist to the sympathetic division, and organ functions balance between them.

Perennial: A plant that lives for more than two years. The aerial parts of perennial plants may die back at the end of the growing season but the roots often endure for many years.

Phlegm: Mucus in the throat or bronchi.

Phytochemical: A biologically active substance in plants (phyto) responsible for giving them their characteristics, such as colour, flavour, and natural disease resistance. Our everyday food contains millions of phytochemicals including bioflavonoids, carotenoids, indoles, isoflavones, phytoestrogens, phytosterols, phenols, etc.

Phytoestrogen: Natural estrogens that occur in plants.

Poultice: A mass of fresh, ground-

up herbs applied wet to an area of the body in order to encourage healing.

Propagation: The process of creating a new plant from a part of a mother plant. New plants can be rooted from stems or shoots, or by dividing root masses.

Restorative: A herb that restores balance and strength to the body and its systems.

Rhizome: An underground stem from which roots and shoots grow. The rhizomes of ginger, turmeric, and valerian are all collected for medicine.

Rubefacient: Stimulates blood flow to the skin, causing local redness and affecting healing in the organs that lie beneath because of increased circulation.

Sialogogue: A herb that increases the secretion of saliva.

Simple: A single herb used on its own.

Sinusitis: Inflammation of the sinuses, with causes ranging from dust to hay fever. Obstinate cases can be caused by chronic sinus infections or the continued exposure to allergens from food, pets or environmental irritants.

Systemic: Affecting or concerned with the entire body.

Tannin: An active plant constituent that combines with proteins; term originally derived from tannum (oak bark) used for tanning leather; astringent.

Tincture: A concentrated herbal extract made by soaking ground up herbs in solvents like alcohol or vinegar and then pressing the liquid out.

Tonic: Slowly restores and strengthens the tone of the body, organ, or system; it stimulates nutrition and enhances or normalizes physiological function.

Urinary Tract: The kidneys and the lower urinary tract, which includes the ureters, bladder, and urethra.

Vasodilator: A herb's action or process in the body that opens or widens the blood vessels.

Vulnerary: Heals wounds.

WOUND CARE

The aim of this section is to provide a brief overview of some wound care strategies. In a perfect world, anyone who was wounded would be able to access a medically trained person who would support them with high-quality first aid materials in a clean and sterile environment. We all know in prison this is not the case. You may need to wait a long time to see a nurse or doctor. Prison officers might be too busy or simply just not care about getting you the help you need. Or you may have been injured in a fight or altercation that you don't want to make the officers aware of.

In prison, I saw many people struggling with major bruises and minor wounds from fights behind closed doors. More commonly, were the women who had self-harmed and cut their arms or elsewhere but they did not want to tell officers out of shame or fear of punishment or consequences. My best friend who has spent the last 3 years fighting for cancer treatment would regularly come back from the hospital with serious infections such as MRSA due to wound dressings not being changed regularly or from the poor hygiene in the prison.

I want to emphasise that the information on this page should NOT replace medical treatment. If you are able to get help, do it. Wounds can be very unpredictable and get infected easily, there is nothing better than sterile dressings or people treating you with clean gloves in a medical environment. Always seek medical advice if you have a serious injury! Bleeding can be life-threatening. It is absolutely imperative to call an ambulance if there is a chest injury, the person cannot breathe or is no longer alert and if you cannot stop the bleeding. Likewise, if the person has lost a significant amount of blood it is very important to get them to the hospital.

This section contains useful information for minor wounds, cuts and bruises, however, I cannot emphasise enough, if you can see a nurse or doctor then always do so.

Bleeding wounds

There are different types of bleeding:

- Arterial bleeding is under direct pressure from the heart. It spurts out in a dramatic fashion and blood loss can be very rapid. It can be life-threatening within a couple of minutes. The blood is bright red and rich with oxygen.
- Venous bleeding is from veins that are not under direct pressure from the heart like arteries. However, bleeding from a major vein will flow profusely and can be just as life-threatening.
- Capillary bleeding is more like a trickle of blood. It is a necessary part of the healing process and occurs in all wounds. Blood loss is usually slight and controlled.

Managing Bleeding Wounds

I will go into more detail about these aspects of wound care, however, a basic overview is:

1. Apply pressure and stop the bleeding
2. Clean the area
3. Encourage healing.

Other key points include:

- Sit or Lay down: depending on where the bleeding is, it's always worth sitting or lying down if needed, in case you go into shock or develop further symptoms. It also makes it easier to clean and bandage.
- Examine: you need to know what you are dealing with. How profuse is the bleeding? Where is it coming from? Are there any objects in the wound? Is more than one area bleeding?
- Irrigation: wounds need to be cleaned out with clean water.
- Pressure: apply pressure to the point of bleeding continuously for ten minutes.
- Dress: Wounds need to be covered with dressings to prevent infection and to reduce blood loss.

- **Further or functional damage:** You may need to assess whether there is further damage or anything else going on for the injured person. Trained first aiders will do what is called a CSM check - circulation, sensation and motor control. When they are checking circulation, they want to be sure that the wound is not causing the rest of the body to be starved of blood, obviously in a small wound this is not likely, but in the case of a larger wound, on the forearm for example, you would want to make sure that their hand doesn't look pale and is still getting blood. The purpose of this check is to make sure that if a nerve or a muscle was cut or damaged by the wound, you know it as early as possible when it may still be repairable. If the person can't move their hand below a forearm wound, it might just be because of pain, but it might be because the wound cut a nerve or a muscle badly enough to make movement impossible.

Wound Care Goals

The common goals of wound healing are:

- Get it clean and keep it clean
- Move blood flow to the wound
- Stimulate the body's natural inflammatory processes
- Support with skin repair and remodelling

Plant medicines can support all of these processes.

Applying pressure

Direct pressure to the area is the common way to stop bleeding or slow it down. Ideally, you would be wearing gloves and have a sterile gauze. In prison, washing your hands and grabbing a clean piece of material might be your best bet. For example, a recently washed item of clothing or a bandana. There are also various pressure points around the body where if pressure is applied, bleeding will slow down. Maybe you've seen it on movies where people dramatically rip off a piece of their clothing and tie the fabric around arms or legs.

Wound cleaning

Always assume a wound is dirty. There may be pieces of debris in it, however, what we cannot see is often the most dangerous. The whole purpose of cleaning a wound is to reduce the total number of harmful bacteria or other microorganisms. Therefore clean it well! And keep it clean with regular changes of dressing.

Top tips for wound cleaning and hygiene in prison:

- Wash your hands with soap and ideally with warm water. Make sure you wash them properly, especially in-between the fingers and the thumb
- Wash your hands after giving any first aid
- Wash your hands after any kind of exposure to bodily fluids
- If you're doing first aid, take off any wrist or hand jewellery
- Make sure fingernails are short, clean and free of nail polish
- If you've got your own cuts then keep them covered if you're dealing with anyone else's
- Make sure you get rid of waste well if you have fabric infected with blood for example. On the outside there would be specific bins for this (like red medical waste bags) however, this is unlikely in prison. I'd recommend wrapping up whatever you have inside some kind of separate bag and tying it tightly so that any wing cleaners don't come into direct contact with infected items.
- Make sure you clean up any dirtied areas with warm soapy water or disinfectant that you can get from wing cleaners. Wipe down all the surfaces and check the floor.

Irrigating the wound

Okay so in an ideal world, you'd have a neat little first aid kit with a sterile syringe and sterile water then you could irrigate a wound with. In prison, not only will you not have access to first aid gear like gloves but it's also likely in many countries that the water will not be very clean either.

To clean the water better you can boil it if possible for at least five minutes. You can also add salt to the water ideally when boiling (at the very least 1 teaspoon per quart - just under a litre of water). If you are not able to heat water then adding salt to it will help either way. Herbalist Katja Swift says in her herbal wound care trainings that 10% salinity kills 80% of organisms in 30 minutes. Therefore, it is worth adding it in quantity for a disinfectant action.

To irrigate a wound effectively you want the water to be flowing away from the wound, so that infected particles are not coming into the wound. Like for example, running something under a tap, as if you are washing something. Keep cleaning until the wound looks as clean as possible and you cannot see any visible matter in there. There is a saying "the solution to pollution is dilution" - basically you want to wash out whatever is in there with good velocity (power) and with enough volume of water for adequate irrigation.

To get further antibacterial benefits, you can also irrigate a wound with a herbal tea or infusion that you have made.

If the wound is in a place that you can't irrigate then you can wash it with a cloth. If there is any debris at all – it all has to come out. Don't try to be gentle. You can use things like tweezers, pins, needles or even a rough towel. It may feel uncomfortable but it is very important. Even a clean toothbrush could work.

Dressing the wound

Now this aspect of wound care is probably the hardest in prison. If you are unable to go to prison officers for help (because of a fight, for example), then my advice would be to see if anyone else on your wing can try to get sterile materials. For example, asking for a plaster or saying they have cut themselves shaving or something. Many prison kitchens will have basic first aid kits in them which you can either sneakily try to appropriate from, or you can ask a person who works in the kitchen to get one for you. Ideally, you'd have access to some kind of sterile gauze or plaster that you can put on the wound. You may need to bandage this up further.

If you are unable to access any kind of sterile dressing, then you will need to make one. Good material can include pillowcases, ripped sheets, cloths, bandanas. Ideally, materials that are thinner than things like jumpers. If possible, try to get white ones so you can more easily see dirt. Wash the material in clean, hot soapy water. A bleach tablet would be ideal if you can get one from a wing cleaner. Rinse out at least twice to completely remove the soap. Hang up to dry. You can then cut the material into size, such as strips. You may need to use several strips on a wound in layers so try to have as many as you can.

You can also sterilise a dressing by ironing it if an iron is available on your wing. Whenever you see material that could make a good bandage, it may be worth saving it for that day when you might need it.

Objects embedded in wounds

If there is debris in the wound, always get it out. It becomes a much trickier area if there are significant objects that may be stemming the bleeding whereby removing them could cause further damage. I would seriously recommend getting to a doctor if possible if something is this serious. If it really is not possible or you have to wait a long time until you can see one, then you can build up dressings around the object to help apply pressure to the wound before

getting whatever it is removed. The most important message is that if there is debris in the wound that you are able to remove then do it!

Infections

Take every wound seriously, no matter how small. It is important to monitor a wound for signs of infection. These can often take 24 hours to appear. Signs of infection can include:

- Increased pain
- Increased warmth
- Increased swelling
- Increased redness
- Red streaking of the surrounding skin
- Pus draining from the area
- A foul smell!
- Tender lumps or swelling in armpit, groin, or neck
- Generalised chills or fever over 37.5°C (99.6°F).

Symptoms will often get worse with time and infection is indicated if the wound is simply not healing up. Many people will be more vulnerable to infection than others. I'd really emphasise again to seek proper medical attention especially if you are immunocompromised, diabetic or have any other chronic illnesses. I don't want to scare people, but infections in wounds if they become systemic (like in the bloodstream) can kill you. I know people don't want to risk getting denied parole, but you might lose your life if you develop a serious infection and it goes untreated.

There are many plants that can help with infections internally and externally, but if you see any kind of streaking, it could be lymphangitis which really demands a trip to the hospital. Likewise, a red waxy sheen could indicate cellulitis and could become septic, so it is important to get to the hospital.

Using herbs in wound care

Mentioned throughout this book are different plants with wound healing properties. Rose petals, for example, can help when placed on small cuts. And daisies can be mashed up and applied to bruises. Chamomile and black tea bags can be placed on most wounds including infected toenails and offer antibacterial properties. However, plantain, yarrow and selfheal are our major wound healing

allies.

Herbalist Katja Swift writes how Selfheal can draw out infection, such as in an abscess, and is very beneficial in stimulating the healing of wounds, burns, and ulcers (including internally). Selfheal also has styptic actions, staunching the flow of blood. Yarrow is wonderful for all stages of the wound healing process, from stopping bleeding to tissue repair. Plantain is superb for wound healing due to its ability as a drawing agent as well as an astringent and vulnerary. (Read the plant profiles for more specific information on these plants).

To use these plants practically there are a number of options:

Using the leaves directly

Cleaning cuts and wounds with plantain: Plantain has a drawing action which means when it is placed over a wound it will help to draw out debris or poisons from bites and stings. The leaf surface can be applied directly to the skin. Make sure the leaf itself is actually clean of stones, debris and dust. You might want to wash it under the tap. You can also chew the leaf up in your mouth to help and then apply to the cut or sting. Depending on the size of the area, you may need several leaves. In Ireland, they use one side of the leaf for drawing and then turn the leaf over and apply the other side for healing. You might want to do this - use one or more leaves to help clean the wound (don't forget to irrigate!) and then get fresh leaves and apply and hold in place. These simple plantain poultices are one of my favourite herbal party tricks. People are normally blown away by the instant results and how quickly bleeding stops or stings go down. Depending on how severe the wound is, you might want to change the leaves regularly until they have had the effect you have needed.

Applying yarrow directly to a cut: You will also be impressed if you apply yarrow leaves directly to cuts (after washing ideally). You will see how quickly the blood stops. You may wish to chew up the leaf a little or you can also just apply direct.

Selfheal: You can also apply selfheal leaves directly to cuts. They are a bit smaller and fiddly than plantain but if you can mash up a few of them and apply them, they can be very effective at stopping the bleeding.

Irrigating wounds with herbal teas

Irrigating and cleaning a wound is of incredible importance, I know that I have said this ten times already! However, the process can be aided in prison by making a strong herbal tea and using it to clean the wound. This will be extra help for fighting bacterial and microbial infections. You may wish to make a strong tea of yarrow or plantain or self heal. You can also use chamomile or peppermint tea if you are unable to access any others or fresh plant material. Make sure if you are pouring tea on a wound that it is cool enough and that the actual plant material has been removed so that you don't get anything extra in the wound.

Making poultices

For practical reasons, you might not be able to sit there and hold a leaf in place over your cut or small wound. Therefore you might want to make a sturdier poultice attached with a bandage. Moisten the fresh or dried herb with water for at least two minutes. You can then either apply the damp herbs to the affected area directly or if you have one, with some kind of gauze material that will still allow contact between the plants and the skin.

What you are trying to achieve is as much herbal contact with the skin as possible to enable them to work their magic. If you are using some kind of powder you might want to mix it with a bit of flour into a paste and then apply. Once you have placed your herb on the area, cover with some kind of bandage or material to hold it in place. Keep it there as long as needed and change with fresh herbs when necessary. If you are simply trying to stop a cut from bleeding, it will heal up very fast. If you are trying to support a larger wound you might want to keep a poultice on for 12-24 hours and change every few hours depending on how much plant material you have access to.

You can also use herbal tea bags as poultices. Once they are damp simply place on the affected area and change regularly.

Compresses

If you have limited plant material, it may be more effective to make a strong hot infusion and soak material in it and then apply the material to the wound. This will maximise the amount of surface area that can be covered and supported by the plants.

If you have cut or scratched your arms, for example, as an act of self-harm

then soaking material in a warm infusion with plants and straining and applying to the sore area can really help. You may like to use wound healers like yarrow, plantain and selfheal or you can also use cooling plants like mallow, rose and chamomile. Making a tea to drink too will also help the nervous system recover.

Taking plants internally to aid wound healing

Plants can also help fight infection and support the wound healing processes when taken internally. Taking a tea of plantain, yarrow or self heal can definitely aid the body in recovering from wounds, as well as stave off infections.

Using cayenne powder

If someone has access to it on your wing, then Cayenne pepper powder (*Capsicum* spp.) can be useful to help stop bleeding. It does hurt a little to apply but it is a styptic meaning it helps to stop bleeding and encourages blood vessels to close. It helps prevent shock and can also help postpone infection. After you have irrigated the wound, simply put the powder over it and then cover with a dressing and apply pressure.

Other minor wounds

Bruises

Ideally, for bruises, you want some kind of ice pack where you can place it on the bruise and apply pressure for ten minutes. If you don't have an ice pack, running it under cold water will also help. You can then mash up some daisies into a poultice and directly apply to the bruised area.

Splinters

If you have a significant splinter, you might need to get it professionally removed. If you want to get it out yourself then make sure you wash the whole area with warm soapy water to get it as clean as possible. Then pat the area dry with something clean. You then need a pair of tweezers. You may want to wash the tweezers too or if you can't, then running a lighter up and down it should kill some things but not all. Grip the splinter as close to the skin as possible. Gently pull it out at the same angle it went in. You can then gently squeeze the area to encourage a bit of bleeding. Wash the wound again and then dry and cover with a dressing.

A black tea bag, wrung out tightly, taped to the splinter overnight can also be effective. The astringency squeezes the splinter up a little and makes it easier to grab. A plantain leaf and banana peel can also have this action.

Nosebleeds

You may just experience a nosebleed, as people do, or you may have been hit and your nose could be bleeding. You can normally feel from the level of pain if your nose has been broken. For a bleeding nose, sit down and lean your head forward. Don't lie down as keeping the nose above the heart reduces bleeding. Pinch the soft part of the nose and maintain a constant pressure for 10 minutes. Breathe through the mouth and let blood run out of it rather than back down the throat. It is probably worth having something nearby to help mop up the dripping blood.

It sounds ridiculous, but I've seen it in action - roll up a yarrow leaf and place in your nose. You'll be amazed at how fast the bleeding can stop!

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

Books

For folks in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland or those wanting to learn more about Traditional Western Herbal Medicine

Hedgerow Medicine, Julie Bruton-Seal and Mathew Seal: Comprehensive book on plants that can be commonly found in the UK

Wayside Medicine, Julie Bruton-Seal and Mathew Seal: A follow-on book from Hedgerow medicine, this one with many ‘forgotten’ medicinal plants in the UK

Wild Drugs, Zoe Hawes: Overview of medicinal plants in the UK organised by different habitats e.g. fields, woodlands. Lovely big pictures and easy to read layout.

Plants and Habitats, Ben Averis: A detailed reference book of different

plants you can find across the UK in various different habitats. May help in identifying other plants you find in prison gardens.

Medicinal Plants in Folk Tradition. An ethnobotany of Britain and Ireland, David E. Allen and Gabrielle Hatfield: An overview of medicinal plants and the evidence of how they have been used traditionally across Britain and Ireland. Very interesting if you are a plant or history geek!

Memory, Wisdom And Healing, Gabrielle Hatfield: A really nice book shedding light on Britain’s folk medicine traditions beyond herbalism.

Hatfield’s Herbal: The Curious Stories of Britain’s Wild Plants, Gabrielle Hatfield: A really lovely book introducing how plants were used by common folk across England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland.

The New Green Pharmacy by Barbara Griggs: Very interesting book about the

history of plant medicine in the west.

Traditional Western Herbal Medicine: As Above So Below, Elisabeth Brooke: A book with a detailed history of traditional herbal medicine in the west, integrating energetics and astrology. Very interesting if you want to go deeper into the history of herbal medicine and its relationship to astrology.

Practice of Traditional Western Herbalism, Matthew Wood: This book is great if you want to learn more about the energetics of plants and people.

Herbalism books not specific to one place

Herbal Medicine for Beginners, Katja Swift and Ryn Midura: A fantastic introductory book packed with information.

The Holistic Herbal, David Hoffmann: A great solid overview and introduction to herbalism.

Nutritional Herbology, Mark Pedersen: Goes into detail about the nutritional contents of plants.

Incredible Wild Edibles: 36 Plants that Can Change Your Life, Samuel Thayer: A book on foraging. Some of these weeds are likely to be growing in prison courtyards also.

The Herbal Kitchen: 50 Easy-to-Find Herbs and Over 250 Recipes to Bring Lasting Health to You and Your Family, Kami McBride: An US book with lots of recipes for drinks, snacks, cosmetics and more, as

well as an overview of 50 plants.

The Wild Wisdom of Weeds, Katrina Blair: A book that goes into detail about different weeds, detailing their edible and medicinal use, folklore and history.

Medical Herbalism, David Hoffman: If you want a seriously geeky textbook, this is the one. Incredibly comprehensive with a biomedical approach.

Botany in a Day, Thomas Elpel: A really great accessible book if you would like to learn more about botany and plant identification.

The Botany Colouring Book, Paul Young: This is a colouring book and textbook so you can learn all about different parts of plants while colouring in!

Principles and Practice of Phytotherapy, Simon Mills and Kerry Bone: A super geeky book if you really want to study biomedical herbalism.

The Lost Language of Plants, Stephen Harrod Buhner: One of the most beautiful books I have ever read. It's all about the importance of plant medicines to life on earth, from how plants provide medicine to each other, to how we need to stop pharmaceutical pollution.

The Complete Herbal Tutor: The Ideal Companion for Study and Practice, Anne McIntyre: A useful book if you really want to study in-depth while in prison.

Books by and for Black, Indigenous People and People of Colour

Every person's heritage(s) will include traditional medicine using plants for healing. Some of those traditions will be alive and abundantly in use in communities, others' will have been violently suppressed often by European colonialism. People around the world are variously maintaining and protecting their traditions (often in the face of continuing colonial violence), and/or actively trying to reclaim lost knowledge and decolonise herbal medicine.

This reading list has been put together by Toi Scott, a herbalist, community organiser and author of *Queering Herbalism*. Toi writes in the beginning of their book:

"I'm interested in knowing more about the healing work of our (brown) ancestors and rediscovering, restoring and reclaiming their healing legacy. While it's great to learn about western herbalism- the very eurocentric view is not really my cup o' tea. *pun intended. I am interested in the work of curander@s, medicine people, sangomas, inyangas, and other indigenous healers who work with plants and herbs and spiritual/ emotional/physical/ and mental health. As a queer-identified, gender non-conforming herbalist, I am also interested in the ways that two-spirited and gender variant healers have been involved in the

healing of their communities throughout generations. It is said that in the past, queer and transgender folks were often healers in their societies. In past research I've found that two-spirit, gender non-conforming people have a long past as healers. Being between genders- neither male or female, or maybe being both, was thought to be a gift in the past, and still is considered sacred in some societies today."

Woman Who Glows in the Dark by Elena Avila
African American Folk Healing by Stephanie Mitchem

African American Slave Medicine: Herbal and Non-Herbal Treatments by Herbert C. Covey

Secret Doctors: Ethnomedicine of African Americans by Wonda L. Fontenot

HealthQuest Staying Strong: Reclaiming the Wisdom of African-American Healing (Healthquest : Total Wellness for Body, Mind & Spirit) by Sara L Reese and Therman Evans

Curandero A Life in Mexican Folk Healing by Dr. Eliseo "Cheo" Torres with Timothy L. Sawyer, Jr.

Healing with Herbs and Rituals by Dr. Eliseo Cheo Torres

Curandero Conversations: El Niño Fidencio, Shamanism and Healing Traditions of the Borderlands by Antonio Zavaleta, Alberto Salinas, Jr.

Red Medicine: Traditional Indigenous Rites

of Birthing and Healing by Patrisia Gonzales

Nature's Weeds, Native Medicines: Native American Herbal Secrets by Marie Micza

Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality By Sue Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, Sabine Lang

Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants, Robin Wall Kimmerer.

Prisoner Solidarity Groups

There is not space to include a full directory of groups, however, if you contact any one of these groups they can direct you to your nearest collective. There is also a resource directory of herbalism projects on the Solidarity Apothecary website.

Incarcerated Workers Organising Committee (IWOC): IWOC is part of the Industrial Workers of the World and is organising a global prisoner union. Contact them for info on your nearest branch.

IWW, PO Box 5251, Yeovil, BA20 9FS
US: PO Box 414304 Kansas City, MO 64141. www.incarceratedworkers.org

Smash IPP: Grassroots campaign to free prisoners serving indeterminate sentences - Next to Nowhere, 96 Bold Street, Liverpool L1 4HY www.smashipp.org.uk

Anarchist Black Cross (ABC): There are ABC groups all over the world that organise practical solidarity in support of prisoners. Contact Bristol Anarchist Black Cross who can put you in touch with your nearest ABC: 14 Robertson Rd, Bristol BS5 6JZ, UK. www.bristolabc.wordpress.com

In the US you can contact the ABC Federation for your nearest group: New York

City ABCF, P.O. Box 110034 Brooklyn, New York 11211. www.abcf.net

Critical Resistance: Movement building group who create and distribute the The Abolitionist Newspaper to prisoners - 1904 Franklin Street, Suite 504, Oakland, CA 94612. www.criticalresistance.org

Haven Distribution: Amazing project that will purchase books for prisoners' courses to a maximum of £20 per person, per calendar year - 27 Old Gloucester St, London, WC1N 3XX. www.havendistribution.org.uk

Books Beyond Bars: A collective of volunteers who send books and other educational materials, free of charge, to incarcerated LGBTQIA+ people across the UK - Books Beyond Bars, PO Box 5554, Manchester, M60 0SQ. www.beyond-bars.org

Books to Prisoners: Have been sending books to people inside since the 70s - c/o Left Bank Books, 92 Pike Street, Box A, Seattle, WA 98101. www.bookstoprisoners.net

Prison Books Collective: Sending free books to people on the inside in North Carolina and Alabama, and zines around the country, since 2006 - PO Box 625, Carrboro, NC 27510 www.prisonbooks.info

Solitary Gardens: A prison abolition project by prisoners enduring solitary confinement and artist Jackie Sumell. Incarcerated persons vision and design gardens that people on the outside create and care for in collaboration with the prisoners. Each garden is the size of a prison cell. Solitary Gardens. P.O. BOX 792404, New Orleans, LA 70179. www.solitarygardens.org

Distance Learning Courses

England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland

Discovering Herbal Medicine, one-year course with New Vitality Tuition

This one-year, distance-learning course is a fascinating introduction to medicinal plants, their properties and uses. The progression of the course is ordered according to the systems of the body, for example the immune system or the nervous system. The herbs appropriate for use in each system are accompanied by a discussion of the pathological changes in the body associated with ill-health and their diagnosis.

<https://www.newvitality.org.uk/> | Contact: New Vitality Tuition, Woodgate Cottage, 37 Woodgate Road, Mile End, Coleford, Gloucestershire, GL16 7QJ. The course cost is £410.

School of Natural Health Sciences (SNHS)

SNHS offer a distance learning diploma course of 10 Lessons in Herbalism. For those undertaking self study the cost is £135. For tutored support it is £295. They also have an advanced herbalism course of 21 lessons which costs £195 or £495 with support from a tutor.

<https://naturalhealthcourses.com/courses/herbalism> | Contact: SNHS,

Suite 10, 2 Lansdowne Row, Berkeley Square, London W1J 6HL

The Scottish School of Herbal Medicine

Offer a correspondence course that takes 10 months (based on around 2-3 hours of work per week) to complete. It covers each of the major systems that comprise the human body, along with a discussion of the things that frequently go wrong with each one and what herbs can help. It also looks in detail at some commonly used herbs, both for teas and herbal first-aid. The course cost is £450. | <http://www.herbalmedicine.org.uk> | Contact: Drimlabarra Herb Farm, High Kildonan, Isle of Arran, Scotland. KA27

ACS Distance Education

ACS offers a variety of different courses including horticulture and permaculture design that I studied while I was in prison. The tutors could not have been more helpful and understanding about my situation. I would really recommend them. They also have some herbal courses. These include a 100-hour course in medicinal herbs and how to use and grow them, as well as nutritional science, health and physiology. A 100-hour course is generally around £300 but the prices for modules vary depending on if you enrol in a longer certificate or diploma course.

<https://www.acsedu.co.uk> | Contact: ACS Education, PO Box Stourbridge, DY8 2WZ

FREE HERBALISM TRAINING TO PRISONERS



COMMONWEALTH CENTER FOR HOLISTIC HERBALISM SCHOOL & CLINIC - BOSTON, MA

The Commonwealth Center for Holistic Herbalism is a school and clinic in Boston, Massachusetts in the United States. The founders, Katia Swift and Ryn Midura, have worked with a team of volunteers to transcribe all of their school's learning material into a printed format so that prisoners everywhere can learn herbalism. They provide all of this to prisoners for free! Their courses are also available for free to family members of incarcerated people.

To enrol, all you need to do is write to them and they will send you the full details. For folks in Europe, the Solidarity Apothecary is currently working with them to see how can make it work over here. We will hopefully be organising a collective prepared to print and post materials to people inside. The main challenge comes to assignments, which will hopefully be able to be submitted to the tutors in the US via the email a prisoner system.

If are based in Europe and are interested please write to: The Solidarity Apothecary c/o BASE, 14 Robertson Road, Bristol BS5 6JZ

If you are based in the United States please write directly to them in Boston: Commonwealth Center for Holistic Herbalism, 25 Saint Mary's Court, Brookline, MA 02446

Family members can also email info@commonwealthherbs.com

Some of the programs they offer include:

- The family herbalist program - learn about more than 89 herbs and how to make two dozen herbal preparations
- The community herbalist program - build on basic herbal knowledge to gain a deepened understanding of energetics, phytochemistry, formulation, nutrition, herbal first aid and different body systems.
- The clinical herbalist program - an advanced program.

They also have individual courses on:

- Herbal medicine for beginners
- Materia Medica
- Herbal medicine making
- Energetics and holistic practice
- Basic phytochemistry
- Fundamentals of formulation
- Holistic nutrition
- Digestive health
- Cardiovascular health
- Elements of detoxification
- A holistic approach to Lyme disease
- Community disaster response
- Holistic fertility
- Herbs for Birth Workers
- Supporting kids through puberty

Don't miss this amazing opportunity to study herbal medicine for free!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many friends that I would love to name and thank. However, because most of them are still bad-ass revolutionaries, we decided together to not list names in here. You know who you are. Likewise, to my beautiful partner, Igor, you are the best medicine and inspire me every day to fight back against the prison system.

A big thank you to folks at Active Distribution to enable the printing of this book, as well as a massive thank you to Lisa for the editing and proofreading labour.

A massive thank you to Amani and her amazing illustrations that really bring the plants alive.

A huge thanks to all the medical herbalists who read the book for accuracy and gave me much useful feedback including Katja Swift from Commonwealth Herbs in Boston and Lorna Mauney-Brodek from Herbalista.

To my best friends still behind bars - Sam, Taylor, Kevan and Sven, and everyone else I know in the prison system, you have survived more trauma and abuse than I can even imagine and your strength blows my mind every single day.

To all the people who did not make it out of prison alive, including Charlie, Angela and Karen, you are not forgotten.

To everyone working to make herbal medicine accessible and revolutionary again, thank you for everything you do.

Big thanks to my Mum and family!

And finally, to all the plants in those prison gardens - I just have unending love and appreciation for you and will never forget our time together.

ABOUT NICOLE ROSE



Nicole Rose is an anarchist organiser, grassroots herbalist and agroecologist living in England who has been active in struggles for human, animal and earth liberation for over 20 years. Nicole did a 3.5-year prison sentence aged 21 amidst a decade of state repression against the campaign to close down Europe's largest animal testing company. She's been supporting loved ones in prison for over 15 years and recently founded the Solidarity Apothecary, a project supplying free plant medicines to people experiencing and recovering from state violence and repression. Nicole is also the author of *Overcoming Burnout*.

Proceeds from this book will go to prisoner support or towards the Solidarity Apothecary.

ABOUT THE SOLIDARITY APOTHECARY



The Solidarity Apothecary is a grassroots herbalism project with a mission to materially support revolutionary struggles and communities with plant medicines to strengthen collective autonomy, self-defence and resilience to climate change, capitalism and state violence.

The Solidarity Apothecary has been making and distributing plant medicines to those on the frontline of state violence. This includes people being arrested, on trial, imprisoned, detained or recovering from these experiences. Plant medicines are distributed via the Anarchist Black Cross, an informal network of prisoner-support and anti-repression groups. Medicines are also offered to the people doing the support and solidarity work during these times.

The project also aims to support frontline organisers with herbal education and tools to overcome burnout and sustain their work.

www.solidarityapothecary.org

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THE PRISONER'S HERBAL

Prisoners commonly experience medical neglect and a dehumanising separation from wild places. However, weeds come up through the concrete cracks. *The Prisoner's Herbal* contains detailed profiles of ten plants, as well as tips and tricks for making the most out of foods, spices and condiments available. Written by an ex-prisoner and her experiences of using medicinal plants in prison, *The Prisoner's Herbal* will inspire people inside and out.



£5

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